

Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



Monday, April 17, 2006
Volume 42—Number 15
Pages 669–718

Contents

Addresses and Remarks

See also Meetings With Foreign Leaders
Iowa

Reception for gubernatorial candidate Jim
Nussle in Des Moines—694
Visit with senior citizens in Des Moines—
693

Missouri, discussion on Medicare prescription
drug benefits in Jefferson City—686

Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced
International Studies and a question-and-
answer session—671

Radio address—670

Small Business Week conference—706

Virginia, discussion on Medicare prescription
drug benefits in Annandale—699

Communications to Federal Agencies

Waiver and Certification of Statutory
Provisions Regarding the Palestine
Liberation Organization (PLO) Office,
memorandum—715

Letters and Messages

Easter 2006, message—714

Passover, 5766, message—698

Meetings With Foreign Leaders

Ghana, President Kufuor—698

Proclamations

National D.A.R.E. Day—669

Pan American Day and Pan American
Week—669

Thomas Jefferson Day—714

Statements by the President

Secretary of Defense—715

Supplementary Materials

Acts approved by the President—717

Checklist of White House press releases—717

Digest of other White House
announcements—716

Nominations submitted to the Senate—717

Editor's Note: The President was at Camp David, MD, on April 14, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Published every Monday by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains statements, messages, and other Presidential materials released by the White House during the preceding week.

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is published pursuant to the authority contained in the Federal Register Act (49 Stat. 500, as amended; 44 U.S.C. Ch. 15), under regulations prescribed by the Administrative Committee of the Federal Register, approved by the President (37 FR 23607; 1 CFR Part 10).

Distribution is made only by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* will be furnished by mail to domestic subscribers for \$80.00 per year (\$137.00 for mailing first class) and to foreign subscribers for \$93.75 per year, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The charge for a single copy is \$3.00 (\$3.75 for foreign mailing).

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is also available on the Internet on the GPO Access service at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/wcomp/index.html>.

There are no restrictions on the republication of material appearing in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*.

US GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS
Washington DC 20402

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Penalty for private use, \$300

PRESORTED STANDARD
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
GPO
PERMIT NO. G-26

Week Ending Friday, April 14, 2006

Proclamation 7999—Pan American Day and Pan American Week, 2006

April 7, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

During Pan American Day and Pan American Week, we honor the commitment to liberty and common values we share with our Pan American neighbors.

The love of freedom has deep roots in the Pan American community. Not long after the United States won independence from Britain, patriots throughout the Americas were inspired to take their own stand. Today, there are more than 30 democratic countries in the region, and through the Organization of American States, leaders in the Western Hemisphere have an opportunity to discuss shared goals, promote prosperity, and strengthen democratic governance and institutions.

One of the surest ways to make opportunity real for all our citizens is through free and fair trade. In August 2005, I signed legislation to implement the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). Our investment and trade through the CAFTA-DR will help build a better life for our citizens, and by reducing trade barriers, we can make our region more competitive in the global economy. Strong economic ties with democracies in our hemisphere foster stability and security and help lay the foundation for peace for generations to come.

The people of the Western Hemisphere are united by history, geography, and shared ideals. We will continue our important work to build a region that lives in liberty and grows in prosperity.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by

the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 14, 2006, as Pan American Day and April 9 through April 15, 2006, as Pan American Week. I urge the Governors of the 50 States, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the officials of other areas under the flag of the United States of America to honor these observances with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:50 a.m., April 10, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on April 11. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Proclamation 8000—National D.A.R.E. Day, 2006

April 7, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On National D.A.R.E. Day, we honor the dedicated police officers and all those involved in the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program and underscore our commitment to helping young people say no to drugs and violence. By promoting positive youth development, D.A.R.E. programs across our country are helping our children make the right choices and build lives of purpose.

Since 1983, D.A.R.E. has taught young people how to recognize and resist the pressure to be involved in drugs, gangs, and violent activities. The D.A.R.E. program brings police officers into the classroom to answer tough questions about drugs and crime, teaches students how to avoid temptation, and encourages communication between young people and law enforcement. This program strengthens our communities and provides our children with a strong foundation for success.

My Administration remains committed to helping our young people overcome the dangers of violence and the use of illegal substances. The Helping America's Youth initiative, led by First Lady Laura Bush, encourages local partnerships that empower families, schools, and communities to help young people reach their full potential. We are also strengthening youth drug prevention efforts on the State and local levels with the Strategic Prevention Framework and the Drug Free Communities program. These initiatives tailor prevention strategies to local needs and give community organizations the power to identify challenges and take actions to overcome them.

In 2005, the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America launched Above the Influence, an advertising and online campaign to encourage teens to reject drug use and other negative pressures. My Administration has also hosted a series of summits to educate community leaders and school officials on successful student drug testing.

The struggle against alcohol abuse, drugs, and violence is a national, state, and local effort. Parents, teachers, volunteers, D.A.R.E. officers, and all those who help our young people grow into responsible, successful adults are strengthening our country and contributing to a future of hope for everyone.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 11, 2006, as National D.A.R.E. Day. I call upon young people and all Americans to fight drug use and violence in our communities. I also urge our citizens to support the law enforcement

officials, volunteers, teachers, health care professionals, and all those who work to help our children avoid drug use and violence.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:50 a.m., April 10, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on April 11. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

April 8, 2006

Good morning. This week, Members of the United States Senate reached a promising bipartisan compromise on comprehensive immigration reform. Unfortunately, this compromise is being blocked by the Senate Democratic leader, who has refused to allow Senators to move forward and vote on amendments to this bill. I call on the Senate Minority Leader to end his blocking tactics and allow the Senate to do its work and pass a fair, effective immigration reform bill.

Immigration is an emotional issue and a vitally important one. At its core, immigration is the sign of a confident and successful nation. It says something about our country that people around the world are willing to leave their homes, leave their families, and risk everything to come to America. Their talent, hard work, and love of freedom have helped make America a vibrant, strong nation. And by reforming our immigration laws to meet the realities of the 21st century, we will ensure that America remains a beacon of liberty for generations to come.

I made clear that a comprehensive immigration reform bill must include three elements. First, comprehensive immigration reform must secure our borders. Since I took office, we've increased funding for border security by 66 percent, and Federal agents have apprehended and sent home more than 6 million people entering this country illegally,

including more than 400,000 with criminal records. To improve security at the border, we're hiring thousands more Border Patrol agents; we're deploying new technologies like infrared cameras and unmanned aerial vehicles to help our agents do their jobs; we're installing physical barriers to entry, like fences in urban areas. We're making good progress, but we have much more work ahead to gain control of our border. I'll continue to work with Congress to strengthen border security, so we can prevent illegal immigrants from crossing our border and make the immigration system more orderly and secure.

Second, comprehensive immigration reform must strengthen the enforcement of our laws in America's interior. Since I took office, we've increased funding for immigration enforcement by 42 percent, increased the number of immigration enforcement agents and criminal investigators, enhanced worksite enforcement, and gone after smugglers, gang members, and human traffickers. A good immigration bill should enhance our ability to stop document fraud and help employers comply with our laws.

Finally, comprehensive immigration reform must include a temporary-worker program that relieves pressure on our borders while rejecting amnesty. A temporary-worker program would create a legal way to match willing foreign workers with willing American employers to fill jobs that no American is available to do. By creating a legal channel for those seeking temporary work in America, we would reduce the number of people trying to sneak across the border. This would free up law enforcement officers to focus on criminals, drug dealers, terrorists, and others who mean us harm. A temporary-worker program would also improve security by creating tamper-proof identification cards, so we can keep track of every temporary worker who is here on a legal basis and identify those who are not.

A new temporary-worker program should not provide amnesty. Granting amnesty would be unfair to those who follow the rules and obey the laws. Amnesty would also be unwise, because it would encourage others to break the law and create new waves of illegal immigration. We must ensure that

those who break our laws are not granted an automatic path to citizenship. We should also conduct the debate on immigration reform in a manner worthy of our Nation's best traditions.

To keep the promise of America, we must remain a welcoming society and also enforce the laws that make our freedom possible. As we do, our Nation will draw strength from the diversity of its citizens and unity from their desire to assimilate and become one people. By working together, we can fix our immigration system in a way that protects our country, upholds our laws, and makes our Nation proud.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 12:56 p.m. on April 7 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 8. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 7 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies and a Question-and-Answer Session

April 10, 2006

The President. Thank you. Please be seated. Bill, thanks for the kind introduction. I'm pleased to be here at this school, which bears the name of one of America's greatest statesmen. Paul Nitze served as a trusted adviser to six Presidents, from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan. He was one of a small group of men who shaped the world that emerged from the Allied victory in World War II. He encouraged our Nation to continue the—its noble and essential role as freedom's defender. He was the principal author of NSC-68, the strategic blueprint for America's victory in the cold war. At a time when some wanted to wish away the Soviet threat, Paul Nitze insisted that the cold war was, in his words, "in fact, a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake." He helped rally America to confront this mortal danger, and his strategic vision helped secure the triumph of freedom in that great struggle of the 20th century.

At the start of this young century, America is once again engaged in a real war that is testing our Nation's resolve. While there are important distinctions, today's war on terror is like the cold war. It is an ideological struggle with an enemy that despises freedom and pursues totalitarian aims. Like the cold war, our adversary is dismissive of free peoples, claiming that men and women who live in liberty are weak and decadent, they lack the resolve to defend our way of life. Like the cold war, America is once again answering history's call with confidence. And like the cold war, freedom will prevail.

I thank Dr. Bill Brody; I thank Jessica Einhorn. Thank you all for having me here. I appreciate all those who teach here. I appreciate the students letting me come to speak. Glad to provide a convenient excuse to skip class. *[Laughter]* I want to thank Bill Nitze, adjunct professor, son of a great man. I know how you feel. *[Laughter]* I appreciate Mike Chertoff being here. I'm proud to see a lot of folks who wear the Nation's uniform for joining us. Welcome.

I thought I'd give a speech, but a short speech, much to your relief, and then I'll be glad to answer some questions.

Yesterday our Nation marked the third anniversary of a great moment in the history of freedom; it was the liberation of Iraq. Three years ago, coalition forces entered the gates of Baghdad, fought their way into the center of the city, and helped Iraqis pull down the statue of Saddam Hussein. What they found in Baghdad horrified our troops. One marine describes how Iraqis led his unit to a children's prison where more than 100 youngsters were being held. Some of the children had reportedly been jailed because they refused to join the Ba'athist Party Youth Organization. He says, "It was really something. The children just streamed out of the gates, and their parents just started to embrace us."

Under Saddam's brutal regime, the Iraqi people lived lives of fear and desperation. Innocent civilians were executed in public squares; they were massacred and piled into mass graves. Saddam's regime denied people food and medicine while building elaborate palaces from which to rule with an iron hand. Saddam sponsored terrorism; he pursued

and used weapons of mass destruction; he fired at U.S. and British air crews patrolling the no-fly zones; he defied more than a dozen U.N. Security Council resolutions. Today, because America and a great coalition acted, the regime is no longer in power, is no longer sponsoring terrorists, is no longer destabilizing the region, is no longer undermining the credibility of the United Nations, is no longer threatening the world. Because we acted, 25 million Iraqis now taste freedom.

The decision by the United States and our coalition partners to remove Saddam Hussein was a really difficult decision. It was the right decision. After September the 11th, America decided that we would fight the war on terror on the offense, and that we would confront threats before they fully materialized. Saddam Hussein was a threat to the United States of America. America is safer today because Saddam Hussein is no longer in power.

Coalition forces drove Saddam from power, and a U.S. Army unit, led by a graduate of this school—Colonel James Hickey, class of 1992—captured Saddam when he was hiding in a hole in the ground. Today, thanks to our courageous men and women in uniform, the former Iraqi dictator is sitting in a courtroom instead of a palace, and he's now facing justice for his crimes.

The past 3 years since liberation, the Iraqi people have begun the difficult process of recovering from Saddam's repression. They're beginning to build a democracy on the rubble of his tyranny. They still face brutal and determined enemies: members of the deposed regime who dream of returning to power; other insurgents; and foreign terrorists who dream of turning Iraq into what Afghanistan was under the Taliban, a safe haven from which to plot and plan new attacks against America and our allies. The enemies of a free Iraq are determined to ignite a civil war, put the Iraqi people—to pit the Iraqi people against one another, and to stop the country's democratic progress. Yet the Iraqi people are determined to live in freedom, and America is determined to defeat the terrorists, and we're determined to help the Iraqi people succeed.

America is doing our part to help the Iraqis build a democracy. Our Nation can be proud

of what our courageous men and women in uniform have accomplished in the past 3 years. Since liberation, our forces have captured or killed thousands of Al Qaida terrorists and other enemy fighters; we've freed Fallujah and Tall 'Afar and other Iraqi cities from the grip of the terrorists and the insurgents; we've trained Iraqi security forces so they increasingly can take the lead in the fight and eventually assume responsibility for the security of their country.

We've learned from our mistakes. We've adjusted our approach to meet the changing circumstances on the ground. We've adjusted depending upon the actions of the enemy. By pursuing a clear and flexible strategy in Iraq, we helped make it possible for Iraqis to choose their leaders and begin to assume the responsibilities of self-government and self-defense. In the past 3 years, our troops in Iraq have done everything expected of them and more. They've brought freedom to Iraq, security to our country, and pride to the uniform, and they have the gratitude of all Americans.

In the past 3 years, the Iraqi people have done their part. They defied death threats from the terrorists to cast ballots not one time, not twice, but three times, and each election saw larger and broader turnout than the one that came before. Iraqis chose a Transitional Government, drafted the most progressive Constitution in the Arab world, approved that Constitution in a nationwide referendum, and voted for a new Government under the new Constitution. And in December elections for this Government, despite the threats of violence and efforts to discourage Sunni participation, nearly 12 million Iraqis—that's more than 75 percent of eligible voters—turned out at the polls.

The Iraqi people have begun building a free society, with a thriving free press and hundreds of independent newspapers and magazines and talk radio shows where Iraqis openly debate the future course of their country. The Iraqi people have begun building a free economy, with an independent central bank and thousands of small businesses and a relatively stable currency. Iraqi people have stepped forward to fight for their freedom as well. Despite repeated attacks on military and police recruiting stations, more

than 250,000 Iraqis have volunteered to wear their country's uniform. These brave Iraqis are increasingly taking the lead in the fight against the terrorists and the insurgents. Today, there are more than 130 Iraqi Army and police combat battalions in the fight, with more than 70 Iraqi battalions taking the lead. Iraqi units have assumed primary responsibility for more than 30,000 square miles of Iraq. We expect that Iraqi units will control more territory than the coalition by the end of 2006.

Iraqis are fighting bravely, and many have given their lives in the battle for freedom for their country. And by their courage and sacrifice, the Iraqi soldiers and civilians have shown they want to live in freedom, and they're not going to let the terrorists take away their opportunity to live in a free society.

Now it's time for the Iraqi leaders to do their part and finish the job of forming a unity government. The people of Iraq have made their intentions clear. At great personal risk, they went to the polls to choose leaders in free elections. And now the leaders they've elected have a responsibility to come together to form a Government that unifies all Iraqis. Secretary Rice was just in Baghdad, where she delivered a strong message from me: Iraq leaders need to rise to the moment, to put aside their personal agendas, and take charge of their destiny.

Iraqi leaders have taken some important steps forward. They've agreed to an agenda for the new Government to take up once it assumes office, including tough issues such as demobilization of the militias, protecting the rights of women, restoring Iraq's infrastructure, and building national institutions that will effectively represent all Iraqis. Iraqi leaders have also agreed to form a new national security council that includes all major political groups and representatives of the executive and legislative branches. And now they must take the next step and fill key leadership posts so that a new Government can begin its essential work.

I understand that putting aside differences to form a Government is difficult. Pretty hard for our country. Our first governing charter, the Articles of Confederation, failed, and it

took us 8 years before we adopted our Constitution and elected our first President under that Constitution. Iraqis are going to make mistakes as well. They are undertaking a difficult process with little democratic experience and with the scars of nearly three decades of Saddam Hussein still fresh on their mind. Moving beyond past divisions to build a strong democracy requires strong leadership, and now is the time for Iraqis to step up and show the leadership.

The Iraqi people have a right to expect it, and so do the American people. Americans have made great sacrifices to help Iraq get to this point. Iraqi voters risked their lives to go to the polls. Iraqi soldiers and police have given their time to make this moment possible. And so Americans and Iraqis alike are waiting and watching to see what this sacrifice will produce, and we both expect results. In the words of one Iraqi newspaper, "The time has come for our politicians to save people from their suffering and crisis. The Iraqi people are more sacred than government positions."

Forming a unity government is critical to defeating the terrorists and securing the peace. The terrorists and insurgents thrive in a political vacuum, and the delay in forming a Government is creating a vacuum that the terrorists and insurgents are working to exploit. The enemies of a free Iraq blew up the Golden Mosque in Samarra in the hope that this outrageous act would provoke reprisals and drag the nation into a civil war. This past Friday, suicide bombers blew up another Shi'a mosque in northern Baghdad. The longer Iraq's leaders delay in forming a unity government, the greater the risk that the terrorists and former regime elements will succeed in their efforts to foment division and to stop the progress of an Iraq democracy.

The terrorists know that the greatest threat to their aspirations is Iraqi self-government. And we know this from the terrorists' own words. In 2004, we intercepted a letter from Zarqawi to Usama bin Laden. In it, Zarqawi expressed his concern about "the gap that will emerge between us and the people of the land." He declared, "Democracy is coming." He went on to say, this will mean "suffocation" for the terrorists. Zarqawi laid out

his strategy to stop democracy from taking root in Iraq. He wrote, "If we succeed in dragging the Shi'a into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger. The only solution for us is to strike the religious, military, and other cadres among the Shi'a with blow after blow."

The advance of democracy is the terrorists' greatest fear. It's an interesting question, isn't it: Why would they fear democracy? What is it about freedom that frightens these killers? What is it about a liberty that causes these people to kill innocent women and children? To defeat them, Iraq needs a democratic government that represents all Iraq, that reins in illegal militias, and earns the trust and confidence of all Iraqi communities. When Iraqis have such a Government to lead and unite them, they will be in a stronger position to defeat their enemies and secure the future with a free country. When Iraqis have a democratic government in place, it will be a major victory for the cause of freedom. It will be a major defeat for the terrorists' aspirations to dominate the region and advance their hateful vision.

Once a Government is formed, the international community must also do its part to help this young democracy succeed. Iraq needs greater international support, particularly from its Arab neighbors. Arab leaders need to recognize that the choice in Iraq is between democracy and terrorism, and there is no middle ground. Success of Iraqi democracy is in their vital interests because if the terrorists prevail in Iraq, they will target other Arab nations.

The broader international community has responsibilities as well. So far, other nations and international organizations have pledged more than \$13 billion in assistance to Iraq. Iraqis are grateful for the promised aid, and so is the United States. Yet many nations have been slow to make good on their commitments. I call on all Governments that have pledged assistance to follow through with their promises as quickly as possible so that the people of the—across the Middle East will see that democracy leads to a better life and a brighter future. The success of a free Iraq is in the interests of all free nations, and none can afford to sit on the sidelines.

Formation of a unity government is a critical step, but it's not going to bring an immediate end to the violence Americans are seeing on their TV screens. The terrorists are going to continue to spread chaos and carnage in Iraq, because they know the images of car bombs and beheadings horrify the American people. They know they can't defeat us on the battlefield, and that the only way to win in Iraq is to break our will and force us into an early retreat. Our enemies know what's at stake, and they are determined to stop the rise of a democratic Iraq, and I am equally determined to stop them.

The decision to go to war is one of the most difficult a President can make. And in 3 years since our forces liberated Iraq, we've seen many contradictory images that are difficult for Americans to reconcile. On the one hand, we've seen images of great hope—boys and girls back in school and millions of Iraqis dipping their fingers in purple ink or dancing in the streets or celebrating their freedom. On the other hand, we've seen images of unimaginable despair—bombs destroying hospitals, and hostages bound and executed. And this raises the question in the minds of many Americans: Which image will prevail? I'll give you my opinion: I believe that freedom will prevail in Iraq. I believe moms and dads everywhere want their children to grow up in safety and freedom. I believe freedom will prevail because the terrorists have nothing to offer the Iraqi people. I believe freedom will prevail because once people have tasted freedom, they will not accept a return to tyranny.

It's important for Americans to understand the stakes in Iraq. A free Iraq will be an ally in the war on terror. A free Iraq will be a partner in the struggle for peace and moderation in the Muslim world. A free Iraq will inspire democratic reformers from Damascus to Tehran and send a signal across the broader Middle East that the future belongs not to terrorism but to freedom. A free Iraq will show the power of liberty to change the world. And as the Middle East grows in liberty and prosperity and hope, the terrorists will lose their safe havens and recruits, and America and other free nations will be more secure.

Today, Iraq is free and sovereign, and that freedom and sovereignty has come at a great price. Because Americans and Iraqis and troops from 17 other nations gave up their own futures so the Iraqi people could have a future of freedom, this world is better off because of their sacrifice. America will honor their sacrifice by completing the mission in Iraq. And Iraqi leaders have a responsibility to the fallen as well. By working together, we'll build a future of freedom for both our people. We're laying the foundation of peace for generations to come.

I appreciate your attention, and now I'll be glad to answer some questions. Please.

President's Decisionmaking/War on Terror

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for coming. We appreciate it. I'm a strategic studies concentrator here at SAIS. My question to you, Mr. President—I'll preface it with a comment. Many of us here are aspiring policymakers. Many of us here hope to one day be in positions of leadership. And some of us may be faced with decisions, very difficult decisions on the use of force and engaging in war. I was hoping that from your experience, you could share with us some wisdom or some insight—not necessarily on tactics but something we can take with us through our careers, that we can apply maybe at some point. Thank you.

The President. Thanks. Thanks for the question. I would encourage those of you studying here to be a part of policymaking for our Government. It is a high honor to serve your country. And my first advice is, never use force until you've exhausted all diplomacy. I—my second advice is, if you ever put anybody in harm's way, make sure they have got all the support of the Government. My third advice is, don't make decisions on polls. Stand your ground if you think what you're doing right.

Much of my decision about what we're discussing these days was affected by an event. Look, I—during the 2000 campaign, I don't remember ever discussing with people what—could I handle war, or could my opponent handle war. The war wasn't on our mind. War came unexpectedly. We didn't ask for the attack, but it came. And so much of

the statements I make and have made since that war were a result of that attack.

I vowed then that I would use all assets of our power to win the war on terror. That's what I vowed. It—the September the 11th attacks affected me. It affected my thinking deeply. The most important job of the Government is to protect the people from an attack. And so I said, we were going to stay on the offense two ways: One, hunt down the enemy and bring them to justice, and take threats seriously; and two, spread freedom. And that's what we've been doing, and that's what I'm going to continue to do as the President.

I think about the war on terror all the time. Now, I understand there's a difference of opinion in a country. Some view the attack as kind of an isolated incident; I don't. I view it as a part of a strategy by a totalitarian, ideologically based group of people who've announced their intentions to spread that ideology and to attack us again. That's what they've said they're going to do. And the most dangerous—the biggest danger facing our country is whether—if the terrorists get a weapons of mass destruction to use. Now, perhaps some in our country think it's a—that's a pipedream; I don't. I think it is a very real threat, and therefore, will spend my Presidency rallying our assets—intelligence assets, military assets, financial assets, diplomatic initiatives—to keep the enemy off balance and to bring them to justice.

Now, if you're going to be the President or a policymaker, you never know what's going to come. That's the interesting thing about the world in which we live. We're a influential nation, and so therefore, many problems come to the Oval Office. And you don't know what those problems are going to be, which then argues for having smart people around. That's why you ought to serve in Government if you're not going to be the President. You have a chance to influence policy by giving good recommendations to the President.

You got to listen in my line of work, and I listen a lot. Ours is a complex organization that requires a management structure that lets people come into the Oval Office and explain their positions. And I think it's to my interest, by the way, that not everybody agree

all the time. You can't make good decisions unless there's a little—kind of a little agitation in there. [Laughter] And sometimes we have.

But anyway, good question. I guess, my answer to your question is, is that you got to be ready for the unexpected. And when you act, you base your decisions on principles. I'll tell you one principle—I'm not going to filibuster, I promise—but you got me going here, so—[laughter]. I want you to understand this principle, and it's an important debate, and it's worth debating here in this school, as to whether or not freedom is universal, whether or not it's a universal right of all men and women. It's an interesting part of the international dialog today. And I think it is universal. And if you believe it's universal, I believe this country has—should act on that concept of universality. And the reason I do is because I do believe freedom yields the peace.

And our foreign policy prior to my arrival was, "If it seems okay, leave it alone." In other words, if it's nice and placid out there on the surface, it's okay; just let it sit. But unfortunately, beneath the surface was resentment and hatred, and that kind of resentment and hatred provided ample recruitment, fertile grounds for recruiting people that came and killed over 3,000 of our citizens. And therefore, I believe the way to defeat resentment is with freedom and liberty.

But if you don't believe it's universal, I can understand why you say, "What's he doing? Why is he doing that?" If there's no such thing as the universality of freedom, then we might as well just isolate ourselves and hope for the best.

And so—anyway, kind of rambling here. [Laughter] Yes.

Iran

Q. Mr. President, thanks very much for your visit today. We're honored by your visit. I'm a first-semester MA student. You mentioned the confluence of terror and weapons of mass destruction as the greatest threat to American security. Will the United States allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons?

The President. Ah—[laughter]—we do not want the Iranians to have a nuclear weapon, the capacity to make a nuclear weapon,

or the knowledge as to how to make a nuclear weapon. That's our stated goal. It's also the goal, fortunately, of other—of friends and allies, starting with Great Britain, Germany, and France.

One of the decisions I made early on was to have a multinational approach to sending messages, clear messages to the Iranians that if they want to be a part of the—an accepted nation in the world, that they must give up their nuclear weapons ambitions. And we're making pretty good progress.

By the way, if you're studying how to achieve diplomatic ends, it might be worthwhile noting that—I think at least—with the United States being the sole interlocutor between Iran, it makes it more difficult to achieve the objective of having the Iranians give up their nuclear weapons ambitions. It's amazing that when we're in a bilateral position, or kind of just negotiating one on one, somehow the world ends up turning the tables on us. And I'm not going to put my country in that position—our country in that position. Also, I think it's more effective that the three of us—the four of us work closely together.

We've also included Russia into the dialog. A couple of months back, you might remember, there was a discussion about whether or not the Russians should be allowed to build—or encouraged to build a civilian nuclear powerplant, but the fuel of which would be provided and collected by the Russians. I supported that initiative. I thought it was difficult, on the one hand, to say that civilian nuclear power is a sovereign right of a nation, and on the other hand, not to then support the Russian initiative. And I did so. I also did so because I want Russia to be a part of the team, trying to convince the Iranians to give up its nuclear weapons program.

Now, I want to emphasize this point, and that is, is that we're not only making sure they don't have the means to develop the weapon but the knowledge. And that's why I was very strong in saying that they should not have—that there should not be a research component involved with the Russian deal that will enable the Iranians to learn how to better enriched—enrich uranium.

But our objective is to prevent them from having a nuclear weapon. And the good news

is, is that many in the world have come to that conclusion. I got out a little early on the issue by saying, "axis of evil." [Laughter] But I meant it. I saw it as a problem. And now, many others have come to the conclusion that the Iranians should not have a nuclear weapon.

The doctrine of prevention is to work together to prevent the Iranians from having a nuclear weapon. I know here in Washington prevention means force. It doesn't mean force, necessarily. In this case, it means diplomacy. And by the way, I read the articles in the newspapers this weekend. It was just wild speculation, by the way. What you're reading is wild speculation, which is—it's kind of a—happens quite frequently here in the Nation's Capital.

Yes. Please.

Reconstruction in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. It's an honor to have you here. I'm a first-year student in South Asian studies. My question is in regards to private military contractors. The Uniform Code of Military Justice does not apply to these contractors in Iraq. I asked your Secretary of Defense a couple months ago what law governs their actions. Mr. Rumsfeld—

The President. I was going to ask him. Go ahead. [Laughter] Help. [Laughter]

Q. I was hoping your answer might be a little more specific. [Laughter] Mr. Rumsfeld answered that Iraq has its own domestic laws which he assumed applied to those private military contractors. However, Iraq is clearly not currently capable of enforcing its laws, much less against—over our American military contractors. I would submit to you that in this case, this is one case that privatization is not a solution. And, Mr. President, how do you propose to bring private military contractors under a system of law?

The President. Yes, I appreciate that very much. I wasn't kidding—[laughter]. I was going to—I pick up the phone and say, "Mr. Secretary, I've got an interesting question." [Laughter] This is what delegation—I don't mean to be dodging the question, although it's kind of convenient in this case, but never—[laughter]. I really will—I'm going to call the Secretary and say you brought up

a very valid question, and what are we doing about it? That's how I work. I'm—thanks. [Laughter]

Yes, ma'am.

Public Opinion/Democracy

Q. Hello, Mr. President. I have a followup question on your comments about polls. Your Presidency has been a rather polarizing period in America. And occasionally, your attitude towards protesters and dissenters has been perceived as being dismissive and occasionally, then, cavalier. And I'm wondering how you feel that's contributed to the polarization in politics today and if that approach will change, given that you have fallen somewhat in the polls?

The President. Yes. Well—[laughter]—I take protest seriously. I mean, I—by the way, I get protested all the time. [Laughter] And I welcome it. I think this is the great thing about a democracy. There needs to be an outlet. If people feel like their government is not listening to them or doesn't agree with them, there ought to be an outlet for their discontent.

And so the protests really don't bother me. I hope that's not viewed as cavalier, but it's just the way I feel. And it's a—in terms of polls, you cannot have a President make decisions based upon the latest political survey. It's just—you got to have people making decisions based upon principle. And my attitude is, I'm going to do what I think is right.

I've got to be able to look at myself, by the way—after the Presidency—in the mirror and say, I didn't come to Washington, DC, to try to chase political opinion; I came to lead this country in a very historic time.

And you heard my discussion about my reaction after 9/11. That's what I believe. And that's what I'm going—those are some of the beliefs on which I'm going to continue to make decisions.

But, no, I hear voices of discontent, and I'm just going to do the best I can do based upon what I think is right. There's too much flattery, too much ego, too much criticism, too much noise, too much politics, too much that, for a President to try to kind of grope his way around looking at the latest public opinion poll. In my judgment, it doesn't serve the Nation well.

A while ago at a press conference, I remember uttering one wonderful piece of wisdom: It's like a dog chasing his tail. It actually didn't fly that good. But nevertheless, my point—[laughter]. But thank you; it's a legitimate question. And so to answer your question, yes, I hear the protests. And I can understand why. I can understand why people are concerned about war. Nobody likes war, particularly me. I knew exactly what was going to happen when I committed these troops into harm's way. I knew there would be—people would lose their life. And I knew I'd be trying to comfort mothers and fathers and grieving wives. I knew exactly what was coming. And if I didn't think it was the right thing to do, I wouldn't have sent them. And if I didn't think we could succeed in Iraq, I'd pull them out.

And the good thing about a democracy is, people can express themselves. We're fixing to have a huge immigration march today. And it's a sign that there's a—this is an important issue that people feel strongly about. And I repeat to you, I strongly believe that societies in which you're not allowed to express yourself are societies which do breed resentment, and, kind of, bottled-up anxiety causes people to become very frustrated. And that's not healthy for a society.

Yes.

CIA Employee Identity Disclosure Investigation

Q. First let me say, thank you very much for being here, and thank you for taking questions. I know we appreciate that. I'm a second-year master's student studying international energy policy.

The President. International?

Q. Energy policy.

The President. Oh, good.

Q. Sorry. [Laughter] My question, sir, is, well, as Anthony alluded to earlier and as you're aware, we have many students at SAIS who are currently working for or considering working for the State Department, the various intelligence agencies, and such. And how do you respond to recent—the recent report by Prosecutor Fitzgerald that there is, in his words, “a concerted—evidence of a

concerted effort by the White House to punish Joseph Wilson” who himself, has a distinguished record of government service?

The President. Yes. No, I—this is—there’s an ongoing legal proceeding which precludes me from talking a lot about the case. There’s also an ongoing investigation that’s a serious investigation. I will say this, that after we liberated Iraq, there was questions in people’s minds about the basis on which I made statements, in other words, going into Iraq. And so I decided to declassify the NIE for a reason. I wanted to see—people to see what some of those statements were based on. So I wanted to see—I wanted people to see the truth and thought it made sense for people to see the truth. And that’s why I declassified the document.

You can’t talk about—you’re not supposed to talk about classified information, and so I declassified the document. I thought it was important for people to get a better sense for why I was saying what I was saying in my speeches. And I felt I could do so without jeopardizing ongoing intelligence matters, and so I did.

And as far as the rest of the case goes, you’re just going to have to let Mr. Fitzgerald complete his case. And I hope you understand that. It’s a serious legal matter that we’ve got to be careful in making public statements about it.

Yes, please.

Asia-Pacific Countries

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. Thank you for coming here today. I’m a second-year SAIS student studying strategic studies. And I’d like to briefly turn you a moment—turn your attention to the Asia-Pacific, the security situation in Asia right now. Secretary Rice, last March, met with her counterparts in Japan and Australia in a security dialog, discussing security issues in Asia-Pacific. And this made many countries in the region very uncomfortable. They felt that this security dialog may have been an effort to contain the quote unquote “China threat.” And mostly our alliance partners in South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand have felt this uneasiness. Could you possibly elucidate for us your administration’s strategy towards Asia-Pacific, ahead of President Hu Jintao’s visit to Wash-

ington? And was the dialog a prelude to a NATO-like security structure in Asia-Pacific?

The President. Thanks for the question. We have worked hard to make sure relations with Japan, China, and South Korea are on firm footing, and they are. First, the Japanese relationship is a close relationship. I’m personally fond of Prime Minister Koizumi. We have a close relationship, and I’ve worked very closely with him on a variety of matters, starting with making sure our force posture is such that can—that the Japanese are comfortable with.

I don’t know if you saw the recent announcements about Okinawa, for example. You’re beginning to see a defense relationship and alliance that stays intact but is more attuned to the future. Secondly, he’s committed troops into Iraq. He believes, like I believe, that democracy helps keep the peace. We’ve worked closely in Afghanistan. In other words, we’re partners in peace.

The South Korean issue is one, obviously, that’s dominated primarily by North Korea. And I made the decision early on in the administration to change the dynamics in that negotiation from the United States and North Korea to the United States, China, Russia, South Korea, and Japan—called the six-party talks, all aiming to get people who have got a stake with North Korea at the table, all aiming, again, to send a united voice to the North Koreans.

I’m a little—the North Korean nuclear issue disturbs me, but also equally disturbs me is the fact that people are being starved to death. And it should disturb the world. It should disturb all of us. The North Korea issue dominates my discussions with South Korea. However, there’s a—South Korea and America has committed ourselves to the peace that comes—or the balance that comes with the U.S. force presence there in South Korea, although it’s been reduced as well. We did not reduce force; we reduced manpower, as you probably know since you study it.

The issue that is on most Americans’ mind, and the issue that really is the issue of the future in many ways, is China. And I would call our relationship with China very positive and complex. It’s positive because we do have dialog. It’s positive because the Chinese

leadership—Hu Jintao and his predecessor—were able to sit down, and we had pretty frank discussions about a variety of issues.

On our agenda, of course, is trade—fairness in trade, as well as human rights and freedom of religion. On their issue—on their agenda has been in the past Taiwan, of course, which is a predominate issue. I've worked hard on that issue to make it clear that our position has not changed, and we do not expect either party to unilaterally change the status quo.

And one of the things, of course, we work on is to—would be very helpful if the Japanese and the Chinese had better relations, and the Japanese and the South Koreans. So we're spending time on that issue, as well, to try to bring a sense of—to encourage more dialog with—amongst those parties.

Our presence in the Far East is really important. And so, therefore, my administration has been active in making sure we stay active in the region. The visit of Hu Jintao will be an interesting and important visit. He's coming into a country where there's an over \$200-billion trade deficit, and a lot of Americans are wondering, where's the equity in trade? And therefore, I think he could help the Americans understand the importance of a free trading world if he were to maybe make a statement on his currency, for example.

I believe it's important for Americans to see a society that goes from being a—have its economic growth driven by exports to one having its economic growth more by consumer demand inside the country. That's an important part of our dialog with China.

It's very important for him to make a declaration on international property rights—IPR. It's difficult for a nation that likes to trade, like ours, to go into a country uncertain as to whether or not patents will be protected or product will be protected from copy. And so it will be a wide agenda.

The Far—the Pacific area is a very important part of our foreign policy. It's one where we've got a very active presence, and we'll continue to keep one. We've got a free-trade agreement—you mentioned Singapore—we've got a free-trade agreement with Singapore. And it's our—my relationship with these countries is based more than on just

trade and commercialism. Mine is to work toward more democracy and freedom as well, in the region, so that we can keep the peace in the long run.

I keep repeating this, I know, but I firmly believe that one way you lay the foundation for peace is to spread liberty and freedom. And there—again, I understand there's a debate. There's a legitimate debate. I'm just telling you what my position is. And I got something to say about it.

Yes.

Human Trafficking

Q. Good morning, President Bush. I also feel very strongly about freedom, although I see it in terms of human trafficking. Your administration takes a very strong stance against prostitution. And because of that you do not disperse funds to a lot of very effective NGOs around the world who pragmatically combat sex trafficking by working with existing prostitution networks. There's no evidence right now that proves either legalizing prostitution or criminalizing prostitution has any effect in the change of sex-trafficking cases. Have you considered changing your ideas about prostitution for the purposes of helping either save or keep people from being enslaved in sex prostitution?

The President. No, I appreciate it. I'm—it sounds like I'm dodging here, but again, you know more about this subject than I, and I will be glad to call Condi and talk to her about our policy. I thought we had a very robust strategy on exploitation of women and children, particularly around the world. I think I addressed this subject at the United Nations and was the only world leader to do. But as specifically about our position on prostitution, I'm going to have to talk to the Secretary about it.

Yes.

Spread of Democracy

Q. Morning, Mr. President. I have a more general question about the United States' work to democratize the rest of the world. Many have viewed the United States' effort to democratize the world, especially nations in the Middle East, as an imposition or invasion on their sovereign rights. Considering that it was, in fact, the Prophet Mohammed

who established the first known constitution in the world—I'm referring to the constitution he wrote for the city of Medina—and that his life and the principles outlined in his constitution, such as the championing of the welfare of women, children, and the poor, living as an equal among his people, dissolving disputes between the warring clans in Arabia, giving any man or woman in parliament the right to vote and guaranteeing respect for all religions, ironically parallel those principles that we hold most precious in our own Constitution. I'm wondering how might your recently formed Iraq Study Group under the U.S. Institute for Peace explore these striking similarities to forge a new relationship with Iraqis and educate Americans about the democratic principles inherent in Islam?

The President. Great question. I believe that the terrorists have hijacked a peaceful religion in order to justify their behavior. I thank you for bringing that to my attention.

I will pass on your comments to James A. Baker, who is one of the chairmen of the group going to Iraq.

See, you said something really interesting. Initially, you said people view America imposing its beliefs. And I hearken back to what I said earlier—this fellow's question here—that if you believe that freedom is not universal, then it could be viewed as an imposition of beliefs. I'm not saying to countries, "You've got to look like us or act like us," but I am saying, you know, "Give your people a chance to be free." And I think it's necessary for America to take the lead on this issue. I think it is—I think it is vital for our future that we encourage liberty and—in this case, the Middle East. And as you said, it doesn't necessarily run contrary to what the Prophet Mohammed said.

It's a—and so how do you advance freedom? I mean, well, one thing you do is, you make sure that the Lebanese have a chance to self-govern freely without Syrian interference. It's one thing you can do. Another thing you can do is work for the establishment of a Palestinian state, which I'm doing. I believe that there will be a Palestinian state that is at peace with Israel. I believe it's going to have to be a democracy—again, a Palestinian-style democracy—to achieve that. But

in my—early in my Presidency, I said, it's in our interest that there be two states, side by side in peace, and we're working toward that end.

You know, part of the debate here that I'm sure you're discussing is whether or not the United States should insist upon elections before everything is right. You hear the—the civil society has to be just right before you can have elections. I disagree strongly with that. I think elections are the beginning of the process, not the end.

And I found the elections that Hamas won very instructive and very interesting. It was—to me, it was a final condemnation of the Arafat era, where people said, "We're sick of corruption; we want better health care and better education; we want—we actually want our leaders to focus on the people, not on their self interests."

And because I believe in two states, side by side in peace, and therefore, expect the Government of both to be peaceful toward each other, we're not going to deal with a Government that has announced that they want to destroy Israel. On the other hand, we will help the Palestinian people. And I believe a democracy will eventually yield the state necessary to be side by side with Israel in peace.

The success of a democracy in Iraq—and as I told you, I think we're going to succeed; as a matter of fact, I know we are if we don't lose our nerve—will send a powerful signal. Imagine the signal it will send to people in Iran that are not free right now. I believe the women's movement is going to be the leading edge of changing the Middle East. I don't believe women want to live as second-class citizens. I believe it's—I believe there's a universal desire to be treated fairly and equally.

And so I think—look, I'm pleased with the progress. I was reading the other day where Kuwaiti women are running for office. It's a positive sign, you know? We've got to be realistic about what's possible, but we've got to be firm in our belief that freedom is possible and necessary. Otherwise—I'll repeat to you—a system that says, "Okay, let's just tolerate the tyrant so long as everything seems okay," didn't work.

That's one of the lessons of the attack on the United States. You know, the world seemed fine, didn't it? It seemed kind of placid—there was a bubble here, a bubble there. But everything seemed all right. And yet, beneath the surface, there was tremendous resentment. And it's now come to full, and so how do you defeat their—now, if you don't think they have a ideology or a point of view, and/or a strategy to impose it, then I can understand why you think the United States ought not to be as active as we are.

But I believe differently. I believe they're bound—these folks are bound by an ideology. I know that they have got desires. They say it. This is one of—this is a different—this is a war in which the enemy actually speaks out loud. You heard the letter I wrote—read from—they didn't speak out loud on this one, but nevertheless, it's a—we've got to take their word seriously. When the enemy speaks, it makes sense for our military, our intelligence, the President to take the word seriously so we can adapt and adjust.

Anyway, very interesting question. Thanks for bringing that to my attention. Yes, ma'am.

Millennium Challenge Account

Q. Hi, Mr. President. Thank you very much for coming to speak with us. I am studying international development. And you have alluded much to tensions beneath the surface of countries. A lot of times, this comes from economic underdevelopment and lack of economic opportunities. You haven't spoken directly about economic development this morning. And I would like to know where economic development lies on your priority list? And also, looking at countries that maybe haven't, in your words, gotten everything right in terms of political stability or democratization, is holding development funds—keeping development funds from those countries actually counter-productive? Because if you can help the country to develop economically, maybe some of these underlying tensions might dissipate.

The President. No, it's a great question. First of all, I'm a—matter of fact, I met this morning with Rob Portman, head of the USTR, about the Doha round of—for the

WTO. And the reason I did is because I'm a big believer that trade helps lift people out of poverty. As a matter of fact, if you really study the relationship between development aid versus capital and the movement of capital and who—and how a society benefits more, it's because of trade and commerce.

And so we've been very active in this administration. AGOA, for example, is a free trade agreement with Africa. President Clinton passed it. I was more than happy to sign its extension, and we've been very hard in implementing it on the recognition that trade is a vital way for—to help people get their economies up and running.

And so, no question, the economy is important. In the Palestinian territories, Jim Wolfensohn went over with a plan—prior to the election, by the way—with a plan to help the Palestinians develop their economy on the—on the exact premise that you talk about. Economic development provides hope.

And so, you bet. It's an integral of our policy. We give a lot of aid out, by the way. We give aid to countries that may like us, may not like us, except in few instances. I have changed the development program, however, from—let me say, I added on to the development program through what's called the Millennium Challenge Account. And that is a conditional-based aid program. It's condition-based upon poverty level, but it's also condition-based upon behavior of government.

We should not be—we should insist that governments fight corruption. It seems like to me, it's a rational thing to do with taxpayers' money. And so part of the—one of the criterion for the Millennium Challenge Account, it says, "You don't get money if you don't fight corruption." We should insist that people invest in the health and education of their people. We should insist on marketplace reforms, open markets, so that people have a chance to realize the benefits of a growing economy. And we do. And so we give aid.

But the Millennium Challenge Account is an additional program that is no question

conditional-based, based upon, I think, rational criterion. I remember having the discussion with some friends of mine from another—from another part of the world. They said, “How can you insist upon conditions for the aid?” I said, “How can you not?” Why does it not make sense to say, get rid of your corruption? Unless you people think—unless people think that maybe the corruption is normal and necessary. It’s not. A lot of people—a lot of countries have suffered as a result of governments that didn’t care about them.

The other thing we’re doing aggressively is to fight hunger and disease. Part of making sure that an economy can take hold is a—for example, for AGOA to be effective, there’s got to be—we got to do something about HIV/AIDS, and we are. We’re spending about \$15 billion—or will have spent \$15 billion over 5 years. And it’s beginning to make a difference. And I’m real proud of our country, and I’m real proud of our friends and partners on the ground to get antiretroviral drugs to people, to help with prevention, to help take care of the orphans. And we feed a lot of people too. Ours is a generous nation.

So the development program is more than just passing out aid. It is trade. It is insistent upon habits of Government, and it’s also fighting disease and hunger.

Yes.

2008 Elections/President’s Second-Term Agenda

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, for coming to SAIS today. I’m a first-year master’s candidate. In 2 years, the American political system will face a unique moment in its history, for, in fact, a sitting Vice President will decline the nomination for the Presidency. What are the implications for the Republican Party, your legacy, and, if you could choose, who would your successor be? Thank you. [Laughter]

The President. I’m not through yet, you know. [Laughter] It is—I’m glad my Vice President is not running for President. Not that he would make a great President, but that it certainly changes the dynamics inside the White House. And it is an amazing moment, you’re right. I guess it’s the most wide-

open race ever. Oh, it can’t be “ever.” “Ever” is too long. [Laughter] But in a long time. [Laughter]

I am going to spend 2½ years charging as hard as I possibly can—I want to sprint out of office. And I will be a interested observer, and I’m sure I’ll be roped into moments after our party nominates a candidate, but I’m just going to let the politics run its course.

And I’ve got a lot to do. We’ve got—listen, here are some of the challenges we face. We got to get off Middle Eastern oil, and therefore, we need to stay focused on a research and development initiative that helps us get away from fossil fuels but also helps countries like India diversify away from fossil fuels. And that’s why the agreement I reached with India is a very important agreement—I thought that’s what you were going to ask. [Laughter]

And many of you are—you look a lot younger than me—[laughter]—and so, therefore, you better be worried about Social Security and Medicare. Our balance sheet is, no question, affected by a current account deficit. But a looming issue is the unfunded liabilities inherent in Social Security. And the Government needs to deal with it. The problem is, Washington is so political that it’s—so far, it’s—well, if somebody looks good, somebody looks bad. And so I’m going to stay focused on that, as well, and hopefully get a bipartisan solution up on Social Security and Medicare, so that we can say to a younger generation, “We did our duty; we did something that’s really hard to do.” But we’d better get it done. The system is going broke, and you’re going to pay a lot.

The immigration debate is an important debate. I don’t—my point is—and I’ll be glad to opine on it if you like. I think we need to be a—understand that we’re a nation of immigrants, that we ought to be compassionate about this debate and provide a—obviously, we’ve got to secure the border and enforce the law. But one way to do so is to make sure that people who are coming in here to work have a legal—get a card so they don’t have to try to sneak across the border, which takes pressure off our border.

People ought to be here on—be able to work on a temporary basis, and if they want

to become a citizen, after a series of steps they got to take—they get in line like everybody else—not at the head of the line but the end of the line. And if Congress wants to say, “Well, we need more people from a certain country,” they expand the number of green cards available.

My point to you is, I got a lot to do, and you’re the beginning—you’re the leading edge of what’s going to happen. I know—particularly from our friends in the press corps, they’re going to be asking these questions a lot, “So-and-so said this, what do you say about that, or so-and-so—who are you for on this?” And I’m going to do my job as the President.

Yes.

Spread of Democracy/Trade

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. Thank you for coming. I agree with your assertion that Iraq is going to serve as a model for reformers, democratic reformers in the Middle East. But at the same time, I believe that whenever the seas are rough, the despots of the Middle East keep their heads down until the winds blow, and then they continue to do the exact same thing they’ve been doing for generations. I’m wondering what pressures are we putting—or planning to put on these despots, some of whom are allies?

And one point of correction to Kent—the first constitution was written by Hammurabi in Samaria, modern-day Iraq. [*Laughter*]

The President. I was going to say that, you know, but I wanted to—[*laughter*]. Each President has his own style about how we deal with different leaders. I believe that it’s very important for people to be—to listen. And therefore, I’m a person who does a lot of my work in private with these different leaders.

I talk frankly with people, but you can’t have a frank discussion with somebody if you—if they feel like you’re going to hold them up for public ridicule or public criticism. And so for those of you who are thinking about being President or being involved with diplomacy, you’ve got to think about how you deal with somebody you don’t necessarily agree with and how best to be effective.

And so I just will tell you, however, I’m constantly talking about the need for there to be democracy and reform. And there’s plenty of leverage throughout our Government. The President is not the sole voice when it comes to advancing the democracy agenda. You might notice Madam Secretary occasionally is outspoken in her—as she travels the world, which is positive. But there are other ways to send the message, as well, that we believe strongly that countries ought to adapt democratic habits.

I mentioned to you the notion of the women’s movement in the Middle East. There is a way where the United States can effectively use NGOs—and I recognize—let me just say, I recognize sometimes if it says “Made in the USA” on it, it makes it more difficult to achieve certain reforms. And so we got to be wise about how we convince others to understand the importance of freedom. But we’re—I can just assure you that we’re constant dialog.

And I have had a lot of dialog with the leaders that come to see me and reminding them that whole societies are those that recognize the importance of giving people a chance to express themselves. And you’ll find in the Middle East, there’s—some people will say, “Well, what about such and such a group; they appear to be dangerous.”

My answer is, if they’ve got support on the street, there’s a reason. And if I were you, I would listen to the people better than they listen to the people. There’s a reason why grass roots movements start. And one thing about democracy is, is that it forces the grass roots movement out in the open so people compete for ideas and for the will of the people in an open forum, not a closed forum. And it’s those leaders that say, “I fear the grass root movement,” are those that eventually are going to get whipped unless they outcompete them—outcompete them in a good sense, outcompete them for services, outcompete those who are stirring up the anxieties on the street by listening to the people and actually responding.

I know that’s a foreign concept at some times, but nevertheless, it’s a concept that ends up leading to a more whole society. And it’s not easy work. We live in a world today

where everything is supposed to happen yesterday. If you really think about Iraq, and it's tough—I fully recognize it's difficult. And I know people are anxious and their hearts break when they see the loss of innocent life. But it was 4 months ago that there was one of the most amazing elections in the history of the Middle East—4 short months ago. It seems like a decade, doesn't it? At least it does to me. [*Laughter*]

And so we're in a world where everything is, like, supposed to happen that way. But that's not the way it works. I believe what we're doing is putting those seeds in the ground. And it's important for future administrations to follow up, it seems like to me. And I said—I thought I laid out a pretty good marker for the United States in my second Inaugural Address, that said, why don't we work to end tyranny—it's a noble goal—under the belief that people desire to be free. And people should live in freedom.

I told you, listen, I'm deeply concerned about societies in which people are starving to death, in which people are ravaged by HIV/AIDS. That's why we've taken the initiative in this country. And it's very important for the American people to feel good about that initiative as well. It's not George Bush's initiative; it's the American people's initiative.

One of the principles that guides my policy is: To whom much is given, much is required. And I believe that's an essential part of the United States foreign policy.

I'll tell you another issue, now that I'm getting wound up, that you better consider and think about as future policymakers, is whether or not this country is going to succumb to protectionism and isolationism. And it's an interesting moment in our country's history. I put it in the State of the Union for a reason. I decided not to go with "here's the 42 things we're going to do to you or for you." [*Laughter*] It's—I talked about—I talked about the themes. I'm serious about this now. And as young policymakers, you need to seriously consider whether or not this country of ours is going to be confident enough to continue to lead. If we become isolationist, then we basically say, "Let them suffer." If we become isolationist, then we say, "It doesn't matter if people live in freedom or not." If

we become protectionist, we say, "Trade is okay, but we're more worried about competing in the world stage than we are helping developed nations grow."

And this is a serious debate that needs to be taken—my position is clear. I'm absolutely for this United States of America staying engaged to the world. And we've got to be confident in the values—listen, we were formed on the natural rights of men and women. Those weren't American rights. They were natural rights. There's something greater in our founding that speaks to, kind of, the universality of liberty.

And we ought to be confident about our ability to compete in trade. And I know it's difficult. I know it's hard if you're living in the Midwest and you lost your job, and somebody tells you, "You lost your job because of free trade." It's difficult for people. I know that. On the other hand, my judgment is if we put up walls and aren't willing to have free and fair trade, it will hurt the world economy, and it will cause people to suffer here at home and abroad.

But this is a defining moment, in my judgment, on these debates. I've got a pretty good antennae. I'm able to—see, I get a pretty good sense of how people are trending. And it's—and I would hope that out of this school comes people who are confident in American values and confident in our ability to compete.

Now, we've got to do smart things, and we've got an economic debate going on here. I think if we run up taxes, it will hurt our economy and make us less competitive. I know we've got to do something about energy to make us competitive in the 21st century. We really have to make sure we've got kids who've got the skill set necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. I mean, there are things we've got to do to make sure we remain competitive. It just doesn't happen. But nevertheless, we shouldn't fear it. We shouldn't fear competition. Competition is good.

And so I just hope—I hope—look, I'm not telling you what your curriculum is, but it's something worth talking about. These are—these happen to be the big trends of our society. And it's going to take, in my judgment, a future generation of people standing up,

not losing our confidence. Look at the 1920s in our country's history. We shut down immigration; we had huge trade tariffs; and we were isolationist. And it didn't serve our country well, in my judgment.

All right, I've got to go to work. [*Laughter*] This isn't work; this is enjoyable. I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to come by and visit with you. Thanks for considering serving our country. It's a noble calling. It's a noble calling and worthwhile.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:36 a.m. at Johns Hopkins University. In his remarks, he referred to William R. Brody, president, Johns Hopkins University; Jessica P. Einhorn, dean, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University; Lt. Col. Fred Padilla, USMC, commander, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarkawi; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Patrick J. Fitzgerald, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois and Department of Justice CIA leak investigation Special Prosecutor; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; President Hu Jintao of China; James A. Baker III, cochair, Iraq Study Group, U.S. Institute for Peace; and James D. Wolfensohn, Quartet Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement. A participant referred to former Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV, who served as CIA envoy to Niger in February 2002.

Remarks in a Discussion on Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits in Jefferson City, Missouri

April 11, 2006

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Thank you. Cindy, thanks for the kind introduction. I want to thank the chamber for inviting me here, to what I think you'll find to be an interesting educational event; at least I hope so. As you can see, I mean, there's several ways to have an educational event. One is to put a podium out there and let me blow away for an hour, kind of, talk and talk and talk. Another way is to have fellow citizens sit up here and discuss important policy issues. And that's what we're here to do today. We're here to discuss health care, particularly for our seniors. And so I want to thank you all for joining me.

Most important, thank you all for a warm welcome. It's good to be back here in Missouri. My only regret is that Laura is not with me. She's actually in Midland, Texas. That's where I was raised and she was born and raised. She's doing a little event there, picking up her mom, bringing her up to Washington. Mother and Dad are coming too, so we're going to have Easter at Camp David. A little family affair which is—[*applause*]. And I'm looking forward to it.

But I've also been looking forward to coming here as well. We just came from the Lutheran Senior Service Center. Carl Rausch—[*applause*—yes, there you go. Thank you all. And we're about to have one of your fellow workers up here, as you'll note. The reason we were there is, we were watching seniors sign up for the new Medicare drug benefit. In other words, we were at a facility where seniors had—where seniors were, and there were good souls from this part of the world saying to people, "Here's what's available for you if you want to sign up."

What we're here today is to talk about health care for seniors. But before we get there, I do want to recognize Members of the United States Senate who have joined us: first, your senior Senator Kitt Bond. Funny thing happened when we were crossing the river. [*Laughter*] He reminded me of how important that Missouri River is for getting farm product to market. I see the hat back there—thank you. Yes, sir. Kind of reminds me of home. [*Laughter*]

And also traveling with us is a fellow who I've come to admire a lot as a straight shooter, Senator Jim Talent—and the Congressman from this district, Kenny Hulshof. Kenny, I appreciate you. Thank you. Peter Kinder, Lieutenant Governor, has joined us; Governor, thanks for being here. Proud you're here. It's good to see you again.

Most of all, thanks for coming. Health care is a vital issue for this country. In my judgment, the best health care plan is one that says, "We'll help the poor; we'll help the elderly; and we'll make sure the doctor-patient relationship is solid for the rest of us." In other words, we don't want the Federal Government—we really don't want the Federal Government telling folks who—what to buy and how to buy it and what price to pay.

We want there to be a relationship between doctors and patients. That's what we want.

But our Government made a commitment to our seniors, and it's a commitment that I intended to keep when I went to Washington, DC. In other words, our commitment is, our seniors should have first-class health care. That commitment, interestingly enough, was first signed by a fellow citizen from Texas named Lyndon Baines Johnson. And so I came to Washington, DC, and said, "Are we doing as good a job as possible to provide modern medicine for our seniors?" You see, once the Government makes a commitment, it ought to be a solid commitment; it ought to be a good commitment. There's no need to have a health care system for our seniors that doesn't meet needs. And one of the things I noticed in the analyzation of the health care system for seniors, analyzation of Medicare, was that medicine had changed but Medicare hadn't.

I'll give you an example. Medicare would pay thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars for ulcer surgery but not a dime for the prescription drugs to help prevent the ulcer from occurring in the first place. That didn't make sense. It certainly didn't make sense for the seniors, did it? In other words, if you're going to have a modern system, you ought to have a system that says, pharmaceuticals have helped change medicine. And it certainly didn't make sense for the taxpayers. After all, if you would spend \$50 a month to prevent ulcer surgery, and the surgery costs thousands to begin with, it saves money.

And so I said to the people in Washington, DC, "Let's modernize the system. Let's figure out how to make it work better for our seniors." A commitment made is a commitment we've got to keep. And we finally got a deal done, finally put aside needless politics. I must confess to you, Washington is full of needless politics. We can do a better job.

We need to focus on big problems, and a big problem was that Medicare wasn't living up to its expectations. And I signed the bill, and I proudly signed it. And so this bill helps all seniors afford prescription drugs. It really helps a lot. It gives seniors choices.

I knew this would be a problem at first. Some people just simply don't want to be confronted with choice. You kind of get settled in and everything seems to be going fine, and all of a sudden, up pops a new Medicare plan, and you've got 42 choices to choose from here in Missouri. And that can be a little confusing. I knew that would be the case.

On the other hand, I also knew there were thousands of fellow citizens who would be willing to go out and help people determine what choice suited their needs. See, I believe that people ought to be trusted. I don't think the Government ought to be making every decision on behalf of the citizens. I think the more that people—citizens are given choice in life, the better off it is to meet their needs. See, when you have the Government say, "This is for you," sometimes it doesn't meet a person's needs. When you have a person say, "Here's some options for you to choose from," it means you could design a program to meet your health care needs. And that's what we did in this new Medicare plan.

And thirdly, one of the things the Medicare plan didn't have was catastrophic coverage. One of the things this drug plan says is that something may happen, out of your control, and therefore, you may have a big expenditure. And therefore, it seems to make sense that there would be catastrophic, kind of, stop-gap coverage. And so over \$3,600, the Government will pay 90 percent in this new plan. To me that makes sense. It gives somebody peace of mind. People say, everything seems to be going okay right now, but if something goes bad, the Government will help you. And so the new drug benefit that we're describing today has got a catastrophic component. And when people sign up, it should give you peace of mind, give your family peace of mind.

Fourthly, it's—I recognize that certain people need help in our society. And therefore, if you're a low-income senior—about a third of the seniors qualify—the Government is going to pay over 90-something percent of your—95 percent of the bill. In other words, we recognize people need help in this society; we're a compassionate society. And so the drug benefit, if you're a low-income senior, is really going to help. It's going to

help all seniors. Matter of fact, it's estimated that all seniors' drug bills are cut in half under this program. And if you're a low-income senior, it's especially beneficial. And that's the way it should be.

I remember the debate in Washington, DC—the language gets a little rugged up there. We had people say, “The prescription drug plan is just simply a hollow promise,” or, “The bill will leave millions of seniors worse off.” That's not the facts. See, when you cut through all the rhetoric and look at the results, I think people are going to be amazed at what's available.

One the reasons I'm here is that even though 29 million people have signed up, there's still about 7 million people who are qualifying for this program, and they ought to take a look. One way to convince people to take a look is to have others talk about the benefits of the program. They've probably got a little more credibility than I do. [Laughter] You don't have to agree with that. [Laughter] I'm just telling you, it's a good deal.

As a matter of fact, we estimated the premiums to be \$37 a month. They're down to \$25 a month for the seniors—for most seniors. When people have choice, the 42 plans helps bring cost-effectiveness into medicine. You got one choice, you don't get cost-effective. You got 42 programs to choose from—it's amazing what happens when somebody kind of competes for your business, that says, “I'm going to try to make the plan attractive for you.” And that's the difference between a government-dictated program and a program that trusts seniors to make choice.

We've got up until May 15th for folks to get the best benefits. If you haven't signed up—if you're listening on TV and haven't signed up, please take a look, call 1-800-MEDICARE or go to medicare.gov if you want to find out what's available.

If you're a son—or if you've got a mom or a dad who is eligible for Medicare, a son or a daughter has a duty, in my judgment, to the parent to find out what's available for your mom or dad. That's your duty. This is a good deal. It costs nothing to look at it. I think you're going to find it's an amazing opportunity to really help your mom or dad with prescription drugs, make sure they get

modern medicine. Isn't that what a son or a daughter wants, to make sure the mom or dad gets the best possible medicine? Well, here's the plan that will make sure you get the best possible medicine.

If you're a church, in a part of a church or community center, find somebody who's eligible for Medicare and help them. It's not all that hard. It's a pretty simple program. It may be hard for the senior who's not necessarily computer-literate, but if you're computer-literate, it's pretty easy. The steps are easy to follow. And you'll be doing somebody a favor.

If you're a senior wondering whether or not this makes sense, you ought to take a look. It doesn't cost a dime to look, and you're going to save money. Seniors are saving about half on the prescription drug charges already. If you're a poor senior, the Government is going to pay over 95 percent of the deal.

I'm here to, kind of, cut through all the politics and cut through all the rhetoric and help people understand what's available. No better place to come than the State of Missouri, kind of the “Show-Me” State. So we're about to show you. And I'm going to start with Dr. Mark McClellan, fellow Texan. McClellan is an unusual fellow; he's got a lot of degrees.

What are your degrees, McClellan?

Dr. Mark B. McClellan. Mr. President, I have a medical degree, also a Ph.D.

The President. Yes. One of the things I like to remind people of is this fact: He's a Ph.D., and I was an okay student. [Laughter] Look who the adviser is, and look who the President is. [Laughter] I've used it before with him. He's a good sport. His job is—what?

Dr. McClellan. I'm the head of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and we are working with groups all over the country to help people find out about the most important new benefit in Medicare in 40 years—that's the drug coverage that you're talking about, sir.

The President. See, we have got a duty at the Federal level to help people find out what's available. That's our duty. Mark is in charge of it. He works with Mike Leavitt, who's the Secretary of Health and Human

Services, and they've done a fine job. By the way, when you put 29 million people, right off the bat, into a system, you're going to have glitches, but they've handled the glitches. They're working with your Governor. They're working with the State government to work on dual eligibles. I know you read initially about the issues related to the signups—we're dealing with them. His job is to run them down, find those problems, and solve them.

His job is also to help rally the country, others to help explain the program. And how are we doing? Give us—

Dr. McClellan. Well, now over 29 million people are already participating, hundreds of thousands more seniors and people with a disability are signing up every week. But we want to make sure, Mr. President, that everybody gets the support they need to make a competent decision. Some of the things that we do in that include our Medicare help line. People can call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-MEDICARE, and get personalized help, finding out about what the drug benefit means for you. If you like to go online, or you've got a son or daughter or grandchildren who do, you can go to medicare.gov and get personalized help as well.

But what we've really found is that events all over the country help us connect with beneficiaries, make sure we're reaching them where they live and work and play and pray, so that they can find out, face to face, what the new drug benefit means for them. We've been working with pharmacists and other health professionals—like at the event that you visited earlier today here in Jefferson City—many advocacy groups that advocate on behalf of seniors, people with a disability—

The President. AARP.

Dr. McClellan. —AARP, church groups, the NAACP—very diverse range of groups that don't agree on everything, don't agree sometimes on much of anything, but they all agree that seniors and people with a disability should find out about the most important new benefit in Medicare in 40 years.

The President. One thing that's important, that people with disability also qualify—

some people do—and they need to make sure that they take a look at what's available.

Give me some of the day—we got a time-frame here we're working in.

Dr. McClellan. That's right. We've got until May 15th—that's the end of the enrollment period. And we're urging people to take a look now so they avoid the rush that's probably going to come as we get very close to that May 15th deadline. This week, there are going to be more than a thousand events all over the country that include many senior officials from your administration, that include health professionals, that include all of these groups that we're collaborating with all over the country to help people find out about the program. We're doing it here in Jefferson City and at events all over the State of Missouri. We're doing it all over the country.

The President. Yes, change isn't easy. It's hard to change, particularly a system that's been in place since the 1960s. And yet we felt it was necessary to encourage change for the sake of our seniors. But we also understand that it requires a massive effort to show people—get it, “show me”—to show people—[laughter]—what's available. And old Mark is in charge of it. But it requires an army of compassion to help.

And one thing before we go to Linda, who's a soldier in the army of compassion, by the way—is, tell me about the low-income benefit. Describe that to the folks who are listening.

Dr. McClellan. Well, as you said, Mr. President, everybody in Medicare can take advantage of this new drug coverage, whether they've got a retiree plan now—we can help with that—whether they like to get their care through a Medicare Advantage Plan—that's the HMOs or PPOs in Medicare. Lots of people like to get help in different ways. But there is extra help available for people with limited incomes.

And so if you're living month to month on a Social Security check or some other limited fixed income, or if you know someone who is, very important to look into the extra help. You apply for this extra assistance. As you said, you can get 95 percent of your drug costs paid for, on average. That's a benefit worth about \$3,700 a year on average.

Now, for a typical senior, you're getting about \$1,100 worth of help with drug costs on average. So that's important right there. But there's extra help available for people of limited means, and we're making some extra efforts to reach out to people who may not be able to find out about this program otherwise. Here in rural parts of the States, we're working with the Grange; we're working with the USDA to get out into the community and, at a grassroots level, help people find out—

The President. We're working with Heisinger Bluffs Senior Living Center, as well.

Dr. McClellan. That's right.

The President. Weren't we?

Dr. McClellan. That's right; we sure are.

The President. Linda Detring, welcome.

Linda Detring. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Thanks for coming. Lutheran Senior Services.

[At this point, Ms. Detring, vice president of operations, Lutheran Senior Services, made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

Ms. Detring. During that time, I also became a Reserve officer in the United States Navy Reserves, as a Nurse Corps officer.

The President. Fantastic, thanks.

Ms. Detring. I retired 2 years ago as a captain.

[Ms. Detring made further remarks.]

The President. See, it's interesting, when you listen to what Linda said, she said "educate" about three or four times. And that's what we're doing. That's why I've asked these people to come sit up here with me, which isn't easy, by the way, is it? [Laughter] Wait until she speaks, you're not going to believe it. [Laughter] Anyway, we want people to know what's available. And I bet you people, when they take a look at the 40-plus choices here in Missouri, get a little nervous at first.

Ms. Detring. This is a little overwhelming at first. But if you help them through it—and I went on the Internet to choose my mother's plan, and it was very simple once I got on there and understood it.

The President. Well, I appreciate you. Thanks.

Ms. Detring. Welcome.

The President. Thanks for serving as a good example two times: one, as a loving daughter, and two, as a person who is involved with the faith community, all extending a helping hand to somebody who needs a little help. Thanks for doing it.

Another person who is involved with senior citizens happens to be Jodie Baker. Isn't that right?

Jodie Baker. Yes, it is.

The President. And what do you do?

Ms. Baker. Thank you, Mr. President. I am a pharmacist. I work here in Jefferson City at Kmart Pharmacy, so I get to see a lot of seniors.

The President. You see people coming to buy—yes, exactly. That's good. So tell us about—tell me about your involvement with the Medicare Part D program.

Ms. Baker. Well, I was very excited to be involved at my place of work in trying to get the word out. And I like to talk. I think most of my customers would agree with that.

The President. We're about to find out, aren't we?

[Ms. Baker made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

Ms. Baker. That's one thing; as a pharmacist, it's heartbreaking to me because I see people come in, and I know their conditions, and I know maybe not all their finances, but the medications are so expensive. I have people ask me, "Can you help me pick which prescription I can get this month?" And that's very hard—

The President. Yes, it's got to be. Listen, there were people literally choosing between the electricity bill and pharmaceuticals.

Ms. Baker. Yes, or food.

The President. And that's not right in this country. And this program fixed it. And one of the things you told me earlier—this, by the way, isn't the first time we've seen each other. Well, it's the first day we've seen each other but not the first time, on the stage. Tell me about what you find with the low-income seniors. And give people a sense—if you're a low-income senior, you need to listen.

[Ms. Baker made further remarks.]

The President. Isn't that neat? I appreciate it. There's pharmacists all over the country who, obviously, interface with seniors. And I want to thank those in the pharmaceutical—I mean, in the pharmacist industry who are explaining what's available. And it's an interesting example, isn't it, of somebody who is combining her work with her care for seniors and helping people see what's available.

I appreciate you coming and explaining that.

Ms. Baker. Thank you very much.

The President. Jerry, welcome. Jerry Sooter, thanks for coming.

Gerald "Jerry" Sooter. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Appreciate you.

Mr. Sooter. We appreciate you being here very much, and thank you. I retired as a funeral director in June of 2003. I was born and raised in north Missouri, northwest Missouri. And, by the way, my wife and daughter and son-in-law and grandson are here.

The President. Yes. Looking forward to meeting them afterwards.

Mr. Sooter. I'm sure they're looking forward to that too. [Laughter]

The President. It would be kind of rough if you said they weren't looking forward—[laughter].

[Mr. Sooter made brief remarks.]

The President. That's great advice. Isn't it interesting, the society in which we live, word gets out; Jerry gets on the computer and taps into the system which, for some, can be complicated—obviously wasn't for you.

Mr. Sooter. I found it extremely easy, and it's perplexing to me to hear people say it's difficult.

The President. Well, some people are computer-literate, and some aren't, for starters. But I like the self-starter—you're a self-starter. You said, "I'm going to look." People need to take a look. That's what you need to do. Jerry is saving 65 percent on his drugs. That's pretty healthy savings. I bet you could use the savings.

Mr. Sooter. Well, that's correct, because last week, when the computer went out on my automobile, it came in handy. [Laughter]

The President. That's good. Well, we appreciate you joining us. Thank you for being willing to tell people your story. You're a lot more credible at telling people your story than I would be. In other words, it's important for people to hear that. Here's Jerry sitting here; he doesn't have anything to—any axe to grind, all he wants to do is tell people what's available. And that's why we've asked him to come. And you're very articulate about it. Thanks for coming. Looking forward to meeting the grandkids. Appreciate you.

Helen Robinette—isn't that right?

Helen Robinette. Yes, that's right, Mr. President. [Laughter]

[Mrs. Robinette, senior citizen, made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

Mrs. Robinette. I save approximately 200 a month on my drugs.

The President. Isn't that interesting?

Mrs. Robinette. Yes, I save approximately 200 a month.

The President. You mean you were paying 300 a month, and now you're paying about 100?

Mrs. Robinette. Yes, yes. It's probably—sometimes it's not even 100. Then also I had—

The President. So your insurance friend laid it out for you?

Mrs. Robinette. Yes.

The President. Explained it?

Mrs. Robinette. Yes, she did. She did. She was very nice, very nice.

The President. Well, she's supposed to be. [Laughter]

Mrs. Robinette. We were kind of dense and didn't understand it.

The President. No, listen, but you're not alone. When you're—this can be confusing to folks.

Mrs. Robinette. It is.

The President. And that's why we've asked people to help—step up and help somebody who needs some explanation. Jerry figured it out, but you, fortunately, had somebody who said, "Look, I want to help you see what's available." And you're saving now over \$2,000 a year, sounds like.

[Mrs. Robinette made further remarks.]

The President. Babying that inhaler.

Mrs. Robinette. I was babying that inhaler. [Laughter] And only took it when I couldn't walk across the floor.

The President. I got you.

Mrs. Robinette. And then all my allergies—if the doctor didn't have any samples, I didn't take it because it was very expensive, and I couldn't do that.

The President. Yes.

Mrs. Robinette. So now with your program, my inhaler is \$5. And I get to take the allergy medicine too, and I love it. [Laughter]

The President. I'm glad you came. Good job.

All right, we're going to end here with Bob Vanderfeltz. Got the Vanderfeltz family here. When I first met him, I said, "I like a guy with a snap-on shirt." [Laughter] Tell everybody about yourself right quick.

Bob Vanderfeltz. Your people asked me when they called me, "Are you going to wear a suit?" I said, "No, I'm not going to buy one; I don't have one."

The President. Yes. [Laughter] Yes, I wish I didn't have to wear them, believe me. [Laughter]

Mr. Vanderfeltz. I wish to acknowledge my family. My beautiful wife and four of my children are here. One of them is a little bit far away. We've got a lieutenant colonel, battalion commander, serving in Iraq at the present time.

The President. Really? Gosh, thank you. Yes, tell him thanks. You tell him. That's great. You know how to e-mail?

Mr. Vanderfeltz. No, sir, I'm one of those illiterate computer boys. I don't even own one.

The President. Yes, well, get one of your sons to e-mail him, and tell him the Commander in Chief is proud.

How do you make a living?

Mr. Vanderfeltz. How do I make a living?

The President. Yes.

Mr. Vanderfeltz. Well, at the present time, I'm retired. I was born and raised right here in central Missouri. The apple didn't fall far from the tree. I live still on the dairy farm I was born and raised on.

The President. Really?

Mr. Vanderfeltz. Yes, sir.

The President. A man of the land. That's great.

Mr. Vanderfeltz. Nothing like it.

The President. You got big hands. [Laughter]

Mr. Vanderfeltz. I know how to milk.

The President. Yes, I bet you do. [Laughter]

Mr. Vanderfeltz. It's kind of like riding a bicycle. You never forget that. [Laughter]

Getting back to what we're here for—[laughter]—well, I went about mine a little differently, like I said, being computer-illiterate—well, what did I have to lose; I called my local Social Security office. And surprising to me, I was lucky I knew someone there, and I was talking to them and in less than 10 minutes, they had me signed up on a program, in less than 10 minutes' time. And from that point, I said, well, I'll find out what it is to get into a program, so I attempted to call the 1-800 number in the middle of the day, and I found out that sometimes automated machines work better at nighttime when they aren't so busy. [Laughter]

The President. Bring that up with McClellan. [Laughter] We did have a problem initially on the 1-800 number. A lot of people were calling, and then they ended up putting a lot more operators on there. Now, I'm not making excuses. Look, I understand. But thank you.

Mr. Vanderfeltz. But I went, like I said, earlier—or later in the evening, at that time, and it was, push the buttons and right straight through.

[Mr. Vanderfeltz made further remarks.]

The President. Yes, hear that—\$140 a month, now he's paying \$7 a month. Here's a guy—he may not be computer-literate, but he's smart enough to call and ask advice for a program that's saving him a lot of money. Isn't that right?

Mr. Vanderfeltz. Right.

The President. You recommend people look at this thing? That's a leading question—I'm not even a lawyer. [Laughter]

Mr. Vanderfeltz. No, I appreciate it very much. Needless to say, I didn't have to go to school very far to find out that it saved me money. [Laughter]

The President. I bet you're plenty smart; you know what I'm saying? [*Laughter*] I bet you know what you're doing.

I hope you all have found this interesting. You may not believe me, but you'll believe Bob, or you'll believe Helen, or you'll believe Jerry. These are real-life examples of people who said, "I think I'll just take a look." Twenty-nine million Americans have signed up so far. There's 7 million more we're trying to reach. If you're one of the 7 million who have not signed up, at least take a look—take a look at what's available for you.

This Government of ours has modernized Medicare so that we can look seniors in the eye and say, "We're doing the best we can to make sure your medicine is modern." We don't want people choosing between electricity bills or food and their pharmaceuticals, like that was happening a while back.

This program makes sense for our seniors. It makes sense for our taxpayers. Do you realize that because there's choice in the marketplace, because we've trusted seniors to pick a plan that meets their needs, the estimated costs in the first year to the Federal Government are 20 percent less than thought. In other words, one of the things that's important for our society to understand is that when you trust people, good things happen. It happens for them, and it happens for society as a whole.

I'm proud to be here in Missouri. I want to thank you all for giving us a chance to come by and say hello. We're dealing with big issues. We're dealing with health care; we're dealing with keeping the peace; we're helping our small businesses thrive. It is a fantastic opportunity to come and thank you all for really being, however, the—representing the true strength of America. And the true strength of this country is not in the size of our armies or in the size of our wallets, it's in the size of our hearts.

And for those of you who are helping a neighbor in need, helping a child to learn how to read, or providing shelter for the homeless or food for the hungry or advice to the seniors, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping to make this Nation the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

Thanks for coming, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:37 p.m. at the Etta and Joseph Miller Performing Arts Center. In his remarks, he referred to Cynthia Brinkley, president AT&T-Missouri; Carl Rausch, president, Lutheran Senior Services; and Gov. Matt Blunt and Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder of Missouri.

Remarks Following a Visit With Senior Citizens in Des Moines, Iowa *April 11, 2006*

Senator Grassley and I are thrilled to be here. One of the things that's happening is that people around the country are beginning to realize there's a new prescription drug benefit for folks on Medicare. And it's very important for people to understand that this is a very beneficial program.

And so I'm spending time today and tomorrow, as I have in previous months, reminding people that it doesn't cost anything to look—that people ought to take a look and see what this good program does for people.

I want to thank Senator Grassley. He was very instrumental in getting this important piece of legislation through the Congress. One of the things I remember him saying to me is that "As we pass a Medicare bill, let's make sure that Iowa rural hospitals are taken care of." In other words, he was deeply concerned to make sure Medicare was modernized, so seniors have choices and a prescription drug coverage, but he was also concerned to make sure that rural health was available for the citizens of Iowa and around the country. And Senator Grassley has been a strong leader in this effort.

I strongly urge the seniors here in Iowa to take a look. So far about 29 million seniors have signed up around the country. I met with some folks today that have saved good money. Today, for example, I met with Helen and Debbie. Helen saved \$200 a month in her prescription drug coverage, and she convinced her friend, Debbie, to take a look at the Medicare prescription drug plan. Debbie now saves \$1,200 a month—saves \$1,200 a month.

So I urge people not to listen to the noise and all the politics—just get that out of the system—and see whether or not the prescription drug coverage makes sense. If you're a poor senior, this program will help

you a lot. As a matter of fact, the Government pays nearly—over 95 percent of the benefits for poor seniors.

Every senior is saving money, and that's what people have got to know. There is an easy way to find out how the program works, and that's to call 1-800-MEDICARE, or you can go on the computer systems at medicare.gov. Here we're seeing some of our fellow citizens reaching out to seniors to explain the program. And this is happening all across the country. I want to thank those who are here for helping our fellow citizens understand what's available. I fully recognize that when you have a variety of choices from which to choose, it can be a little confusing at first. In other words, people get on the computer, and say, "Look at all these different options."

But the good thing about the programs and the people who are willing to help is that they can design a program that meets your needs. And that's really important. Now, if you're a son or a daughter whose mom or dad is Medicare-eligible, please help your parent; please do your duty. If you're in a church or a community center, find an elderly citizen who has yet to sign up for Medicare and show him or her what is possible. This is a good program for our seniors. It is a good deal, and it's very important for seniors to sign up prior to May 15th.

And so I'm thrilled to be back in your State, Senator. Iowa has got a special spot in my heart. I bring greetings from the First Lady Bush. And I also, again, encourage the citizens here in Iowa and around the country who are eligible for Medicare, to make sure you look at the program. And again, I remind you of the examples of Helen and Debbie. Debbie's case is an extraordinary case, where she is receiving a lot of help. And that's what we want this program to do, is to provide people with a lot of help.

So thank you very much. The Senator and I look forward to greeting you personally. Appreciate you letting us come by to say hello.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:20 p.m. at Wesley Acres retirement community. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Reception for Gubernatorial Candidate Jim Nussle in Des Moines

April 11, 2006

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Governor, I appreciate that introduction. I can't tell you how delighted I am to support Jim Nussle as the next Governor of the State of Iowa. He was there—he was there in Amana. No question about it. He introduced me. What he forgot to tell you was, he actually sang. *[Laughter]* He'll be known as the singing Governor of Iowa. *[Laughter]*

I've gotten to know this man real well. I've seen him when the heat's on. You know, you can judge a person in Washington by how they react to pressure. Jim Nussle stands strong when there's pressure. You need a Governor of Iowa who can take the heat and lead this State to a better future, and that man is Jim Nussle.

He's a proven leader. See, that's what the people of Iowa need. They need somebody to lead. He's proven himself to be a leader. He's got a record, something people can look at. The thing I like about him is, when he gives your word, he keeps it. When he looks you in the eye and says, "Mr. President, I'm with you," he means it. What the people of Iowa need is a Governor who looks the people in the eye and says, "This is what I intend to do," and then does what he says he's going to do in office, and that man is Jim Nussle.

I like the fact he's getting Democrat support. I think you need a Governor who can reach across party lines to get things done. I was pleased to see Terry Duggan, the former mayor of Dubuque, is here tonight. He's a Democrat who's switching so he can support his friend Jim Nussle. That's the kind of Governor Nussle will be—he's the kind of person who sets clear agendas and clear goals and brings people together to achieve the goals. People in Iowa, like they are all across the country, are sick and tired of needless politics. What they want is leadership. And they'll get strong leadership in Jim Nussle as the Governor.

And I'm proud to be with his wife, Karen, the next first lady of the State of Iowa. I know something about First Ladies—I'm married

to one. *[Laughter]* And Laura sends her love. Nussle came out to the airport, and he said, "Fine, I'm glad to have you here this time of the year, but when we're coming down the stretch, make sure you send the A Team." *[Laughter]* I said, "Which one, Mother or Laura?" *[Laughter]* He said, "Both." *[Laughter]* They both want Jim Nussle to be the Governor of this important State. They know him well, and they admire him and like him. And Jim, Mother and Laura send their best.

It's also a thrill to be here with your parents, Mark and Lori. You know, there's nothing better than having a strong family, coming down the stretch in a political campaign. And nothing, also, better than having a good runningmate, and it's an honor to be here with Bob Vander Plaats and his wife, Darla. Thank you all for being here. Good luck to you.

I'll never forget campaigning in Iowa, and particularly in the caucuses in 2000. And I had the honor of campaigning with your United States Senator. And so we're driving down the road, and he said, "Old Bill lives in that house, and Jim lives in that house. That's the Smiths' house over there." I've never been with a person who understands the grassroots and the people of Iowa better than Chuck Grassley. Senator, I'm thrilled to be here with you. Oh, there he is.

And so we land at the airport, and Senator Grassley says, "I want you to meet the next member of the statehouse from the 17th District." I said, "I'm looking forward to that, Senator. Who is he?" He said, "Well, it just happens to be my grandson, Pat Grassley." You're following the footsteps, Pat, of a really fine man in your grandfather. Good luck to you. All I can tell you is, they had Grassley in to talk about key issues facing the country, and he said, "Before we talk about the key issues, I just want you to know, my grandson is going to be elected." *[Laughter]* The guy puts his family first, and I appreciate that.

I'm also honored to be here with Congressman Steve King of Iowa. Where are you, Steve? There he is. Thanks for coming. I know when Nussle gets elected to be the Governor, he's going to be smart enough to call upon former Governor Bob Ray for advice. Bob Ray is here—thrilled you're here,

Governor. Thanks for coming—one of the real class acts in Iowa politics.

State Senator Jeff Lamberti, who's going to be the next United States Congressman from the 3d Congressional District, is with us.

You know, one of the people that has impressed me the most here in Iowa politics is a fellow who's served as a State senator, but he left the party chairmanship of Iowa to go to Iraq. His country called; he said, "Yes, sir, I want to serve"—and that's Chuck Larson.

It's good to see the speaker is here. It's a good sign, Governor. When the speaker starts showing up before the elections, it's always a good sign something is in the air. And by the way, this is a huge crowd for a person running for Governor. And I want to thank you all for coming to support this good man. It's a good sign this early in the campaign to have such a big crowd.

Speaker Chris Rants is here. Thanks for coming, Speaker. And I want to thank Chuck Gipp as well, the majority leader. You're going to have you a Governor you can work with and get some stuff done. I want to appreciate the State auditor—David, thanks for coming. It's proud to be with you again.

I want to thank the party chairman; I want to thank the grassroots activists; I want to thank those who are getting ready to turn out the vote next fall for what you're going to do. You got to help this good man. You got to start manning the phones and putting up the signs at the right time. He's going to count on you to win this election. He cannot do it alone. And I want to thank those of you who have contributed to his campaign. It's hard to have a fundraiser this successful this early in the campaign season. It means you put together a good organization. And I want to thank those who put this fundraising dinner on. You know, it's nothing better than to be a candidate running for office and know that there's a lot of good folks standing with you. It's going to be the kind of thing that empowers the candidacy as it gets closer to the election. The fact that he's had this many folks show up is a good sign. And I want to thank you all for contributing to the next Governor of your State.

You know, I've gotten to see Nussle during some interesting times in our country—we are living in historic times. I wish I could report to you that this was a nation that wasn't at war, but we are. And it's a deadly serious war. It's a war that requires strong leadership and resolve. The war came to us on September the 11th, 2001, and we didn't ask for it, but it came unexpectedly. We lost more people on that day than we lost at Pearl Harbor. It's a day I'll never forget. And it's formulated how I think about foreign policy.

I said to myself on that day that I would use all assets of national power to protect the American people. The most important job Jim and I have in Washington, DC, is to protect our country. And the best way to do that is to stay on the offense, is never relent, is never give in, is never hope for the best but to pursue the enemy until we bring them to justice.

And Iraq is the central front on this broad war on terror. You know, I said this—I gave a speech the other day and in it I said something—I said, you know, I wonder why people—what kind of people is it who wants to stop democracy? In our country, we got to think about the nature of the type of person that can't stand liberty. What kind of people is it, when they see a chance for people to live in a free society, they do everything in their power to stop the advance of freedom? I'll tell you what kind of people it is—these are the kind of people who think the opposite of—they adhere to an ideology that's dark and dangerous.

The enemy that we face has got plans. They got ambitions. They believe that democracies are weak. They believe it's a matter of time for the United States to withdraw, and by withdrawing, they would find safe haven from which to launch attacks again. We're not going to be intimidated by thugs and assassins. We will achieve victory in Iraq, and by achieving victory in Iraq, we will make it more secure for a generation of Americans.

They hope that we lose our nerve. We will not lose our nerve. We will stand with the brave freedom fighters and democracy—democrats in Iraq—[*applause*].

These are difficult times for the American people, and I understand that. The enemy cannot defeat us on the battlefield. The only

thing they can do is kill innocent life and hope we retreat. We're not going to retreat. Victory in Iraq is vital for our security. We got one powerful weapon going for us besides our brave military, and that is liberty. Jim Nussle and I understand that liberty is universal, that there is an Almighty, and the Almighty's gift to each man and woman on the face of the Earth is freedom, that deep in everybody's soul is the desire to live in a free society. And we understand that as democracy takes hold in parts of the world that is desperate for freedom, we are laying the foundation of peace for a generation to come.

The temptation in Washington, DC, is to try to make decisions based upon polls or focus groups. You cannot lead the Nation, nor can you lead a State, if you rely upon polls to tell you what to think. The thing I like about Jim Nussle is, he stands on principle. Principles will be the bedrock for his decisionmaking. You don't have to worry about this man—kind of drift, trying to figure out what he thinks or what he believes. He'll lead this State to a better tomorrow because he's a man willing to stand on principle and make the hard decision and stand by it.

I've got to see him when it comes time to spending your money. And he's pretty good about it. You know, the temptation—every program sounds great in Washington, by the way. And believe me, those appropriators in Washington, they love to appropriate. And that's why it's been important to have an ally on the budget in Jim Nussle. We have passed some lean budgets in Washington, DC, because we want to cut the deficit in half. But he's not going to fall into that trap that you hear coming out of the halls of legislatures all around the country that say, "In order to balance the budget, let's raise taxes." That's what you're going to hear out of Washington, DC. But that's not how Washington works. Yeah, they'll raise your taxes all right, but they'll also figure out ways to spend your money. The best way to balance this budget is to keep your taxes low so this economy grows and be wise about how we spend your money. And Jim Nussle is doing just that as the budget chairman of the House.

He's got a plan to reform the taxes of Iowa. He's got a plan to keep this State on the leading edge of economic vitality. And he's the kind of fellow that can take a plan and put it into action. You know, we were talking about education behind the stage. When I was the Governor of Texas, I used to say education is to a State what national defense is to the Federal Government. Nussle says, "You bet, education is going to be my number-one priority." And it should be. It's really important to get it right. It's important to have a Governor who's willing to challenge the status quo when he sees failure and mediocrity. It's important to have a Governor set high standards. I love the idea of hearing a Governor-to-be who says, "I'm going to make sure that Iowa is the center of excellence for public education in the United States of America." And there's no doubt in my mind he can get it done.

Senator Grassley and I went over to watch some seniors sign up for Medicare. Jim Nussle and Senator Grassley and I have got a vision for health care for this country, and he's got a good vision for the State. We believe that the Government ought to fulfill its promises to seniors and the poor. But we also believe that Government shouldn't be telling the rest of us who our doctor ought to be and what the procedures ought to be. We believe in the doctor-patient relationship. It's going to be important to have a Governor who understands the power of health savings accounts and association health plans, who understands you can't have good medical care if you're driving good doctors out of the practice of medicine because of frivolous and junk lawsuits.

You know, it's really interesting; I remember coming in the 2002 campaign—we were talking about Medicare, and both Senator Grassley and Congressman Nussle said to me—they said, "If you're going to write that law and modernize Medicare so that seniors have got prescription drug benefits, you make sure we do something about rural health care in Iowa and across the country." They were instrumental in making sure that Iowa hospitals were taken care of. You're about to have yourself a Governor who understands the importance of rural health care in the State of Iowa.

I was trying to find Jim Nussle when I was giving my State of the Union. It's pretty close-in at the State of the Union. It looks like a big hall, but it's not. As a matter of fact, you can look them in the eye when you're giving the speech. And so I was trying to seek him out when I said, "We got a problem; we're addicted to oil." See, he's been—he and Grassley have both been working on me for a long time about making sure that renewables become the centerpiece of our energy policy. I agree with them wholeheartedly. For the sake of economic security and for the sake of national security, we got to get off of Middle Eastern oil. And the best way to do so is with Iowa corn.

A couple of corn growers popped up. [Laughter] And I'm earnest about this, and I look forward to working with Jim throughout the remainder of this congressional term to make sure we got ample money in our budgets for research and development. And we want to be using corn for ethanol; we want to be using cane; we want to be using biomass. He's got a vision for Iowa that makes sense, and it's a vision that's important for our country as well. And we got to put our mind to it. I'm looking forward to working with this Governor in this important agricultural State. I can't wait for the day for some President to say, "Look, the crop—look at the crop report. We got a lot of corn, which means we're less dependent on foreign sources of energy." It is vital for this Nation to get off oil if we expect to be a competitive nation in the 21st century. And I'm looking forward to working with Jim Nussle.

I think it's important to have you a Governor who understands that every life is precious and works to promote a culture of life in the State of Iowa. And that will be Jim Nussle. And I think it's important to have a Governor who understands the government can't do everything when it comes to helping heal broken hearts. The way I like to put it is, government can hand out money, but it can't put hope in a person's heart or a sense of purpose in a person's life. I think it's important to have a Governor who is able to elevate and capture that great compassion of the people of Iowa to help solve seemingly intractable problems. I think it's important

to have a Governor who says, "Fine, government has got a role, but a primary responsibility of the citizens is to love a neighbor who hurts, is to feed the hungry, find shelter for the homeless."

I think it's important to have a Governor who is willing to call upon the faith-based institutions of a State to say, "Why don't you help us heal the addicted, find love for the person who needs love?" Governments are law and justice; government isn't love. But fortunately for places like Iowa, there are thousands of loving people who look forward to be called to action, who look forward to rallying behind a Governor who says, "Let us make this State the best State it can possibly be." And that Governor-to-be is Governor Jim Nussle.

It's an honor to be with this good man. Thank you all for supporting him. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:05 p.m. at Hy-Vee Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Robert Vander Plaats, candidate for Lieutenant Governor of Iowa and his wife, Darla; Christopher Rants, speaker, and Chuck Gipp, majority leader, Iowa State House of Representatives; Iowa Auditor of State David A. Vaudt; and Ray Hoffman, chairman, Republican Party of Iowa.

Message on the Observance of Passover, 5766

April 11, 2006

Say therefore to the people of Israel, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment."

Exodus 6:6

I send greetings to those observing Passover, beginning at sundown on April 12.

The story of the Jewish people throughout history reflects the triumph of faith, the importance of family, and the power of hope. During Passover, Jewish people across America and around the world gather together with family and friends to celebrate the liberation of the Children of Israel from slavery. By reading the Haggadah, singing traditional songs, and sharing the Seder meal, Jewish

people relive the story of their redemption and ensure that their values and heritage are passed on to future generations.

During this celebration of faith and hope, we are reminded that freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man, woman, and child. We pray for a more peaceful and hopeful world where the blessings of liberty are bestowed upon all mankind.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a blessed Passover.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Remarks Following Discussions With President John Agyekum Kufuor of Ghana

April 12, 2006

President Bush. Mr. President, welcome. It's good to have you back. We just had a wonderful discussion about our bilateral relations and a great discussion about the world. I really enjoy talking to a man of vision and strength and character. President Kufuor has done a fantastic job for Ghana. He's told the people of his country he'd bring honesty to government, and he has. He told the people of his country that he would work on a—create a stable economic platform for—and he has done that as well. And he's a man of peace. He cares deeply about peace in the region.

As a result of his leadership and our confidence in his Government, we're very happy to work with his country to promote what we've called the Millennium Challenge Account. It's a statement of our respect, and it's a statement for our appreciation for somebody who is willing to invest in his people, is willing to fight corruption, who is willing to help a market economy grow.

Mr. President, congratulations on your record of leadership. Thank you for being a man of peace. Thank you for coming to Washington.

President Kufuor. I want to thank the President for understanding Africa. His works, for the past 5 years or so, have done so much in terms of contributing to the fight

against HIV/AIDS on two fronts—the fund you set up, \$15 billion fund, some of which has helped to, in a way, save and also make life easier for over 400,000 afflicted people.

Then on the education front, I was honored with a visit from Mrs. Bush just about 2 months ago, during which she launched a program towards linking the messages of the United States and Africa, to work out curriculum for primary and basic education, and also for supplying textbooks and education materials for children, and also helping with education for girls.

And then there's AGOA, which Ghana is benefiting from, even though there we need more help. [*Laughter*] And then there's the TIFA, Trade and Investment Framework law. I believe this is a President that is helping Africa help itself. And we count on your support.

On the MCA front, everything going to plan, Ghana and the United States will sign a compact by July. And that would enable Ghana pursue modernized agriculture. We are largely an agricultural country, and these projects that would free hundreds of millions of dollars to help modernize our agriculture would affect as many as 3 million people, help reduce poverty, and also push growth for the economy.

So we see the President as a friend of Ghana's, and I can say, of much of Africa. Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. President. Let's go have lunch.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:57 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks in a Discussion on Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits in Annandale, Virginia

April 12, 2006

The President. Thanks for coming. I first want to thank Bob Templin, who is the president of Northern Virginia Community College, for hosting us again. This is a place of educational excellence, and what you're about to watch is a seminar on the new Medicare benefit. And the reason why we've got to conduct seminars on education about what's available is because there is a lot of

people who haven't signed up yet for the Medicare benefit, and we want people to pay attention to what's available.

And one of the interesting things about this meeting is, I'm trying to show that our Government is reaching out to people from all walks of life and all neighborhoods. And so this is my job. I'm the Commander in Chief, but I'm sometimes the Educator in Chief, and that's what I am here to do today. So thank you for coming.

As you can see, we've got a different way of doing this—it's not going to be just a speech, but it's going to be—I'm going to rely upon our fellow citizens to help share what's available and why you ought to take a look, if you're eligible for the Medicare program. We want everybody around our country who's eligible for Medicare to take a look and see if it will make your life better. What I'm saying is, it will.

So, Bob, thanks for having us. I want to thank Vellie Dietrich-Hall, the commissioner of the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islands. Thank you, Vellie. Clayton Fong, who is with us, he is the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging executive director. I want to thank all the community leaders here.

I particularly want to thank the veterans who are here with us today. We have been joined by a special group of people, the veterans from the 442d Regimental Combat Team. By the way, Senator Inouye of Hawaii was a member of that very important regimental combat team, and I want to thank you all for being here today, and thanks for serving our country. Welcome.

I also want to thank the Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao, who is going to have some remarks here.

So we're talking about Medicare. Our Government made a commitment to our seniors to provide health care. My attitude is, if Government makes a commitment, then we better make sure we make a good commitment. And I was worried that the commitment we made to our seniors was not as good as it could be. And so I went to the United States Congress and said, "Let's work together to make sure the medicine we provide for our seniors is modern and is up to date."

One of the things that we didn't do through the Medicare system prior to this reform was, we didn't provide prescription drugs. But prescription drugs was an important part of medicine. I'll give you an example. If you would have ulcer surgery under Medicare, the Government would pay about \$28,000, but the Government wouldn't pay one dime for the medicine that would help you prevent the ulcer surgery in the first place. Now that didn't make any sense. It didn't make any sense to not pay \$500 to save 28,000.

And so I said, well, we can do better than this. Let's make sure the medicine we deliver to our seniors is modern. Let's make sure the program works as well as it possibly can. And we passed a bill.

And so one of the things that this bill does is, it says to seniors, here's a new plan for you to look at. As a matter of fact, in the State of Virginia, there's over 40 plans to look at—40 different options for a senior to choose from. I thought that was very important to have available for seniors. Government tends to say, sometimes, "I'll choose for you." I believe Government ought to say, "We trust you with your choice, and here are some options from which to choose."

The problem with that is that can be confusing to some seniors. Some people reach the stage in life where they just simply don't want a choice. They're happy with the way things are. And I knew that would be the case when we started to bring out the Medicare program. So we put in place—and you'll hear from some people who have been involved with outreach to our senior citizens. That means, we'll go out and explain to people why the different options may make sense to a senior, so a senior can design a program to meet his or her needs, that makes the medicine modern. This program helps all seniors with their drug benefits. That's important to know. This program provides choices for seniors. And although that can be somewhat confusing, it's an important part of the program.

As a matter of fact, it's part of my philosophy. My philosophy is, let's trust the consumer. Let's trust the taxpayer. Let's give people different options from which to choose. Let them design the program, not

have the government design the program for them.

By the way, they estimated the cost at something like \$34 per month premium for the drug program for the typical senior, because there are choices. It now costs about \$25 a month. In other words, choices mean people are going to compete for your business, and that's an important part of helping to hold the cost down for the people we're trying to help, as well as the taxpayers who are paying the bills.

This program provides what's called stop-gap insurance. In other words, when you reach \$3,600 for drug costs, the Government pays 95 percent of the bills for you. I think that makes sense. It makes sense for a senior to know that he or she doesn't have to worry if something out of the ordinary were to occur; kind of, a catastrophic plan would be available to help. It makes sense for a son or daughter who might be worried about his or her parents' finances. And so this new plan has got what we call catastrophic care or stop-gap care which is very important.

And, finally, if you're a low-income senior—about a third of the people eligible for Medicare are low-income—or incomes are such that they qualify, the Government will pay over 95 percent of all the costs. If you're a low-income senior, you really need to look at this program. Any senior needs to look at this program. The average cost savings per senior on the Medicare program, on these pharmaceuticals, is one-half. People's drug bills have been cut by half because they have signed up for this program. And that's really important. It's important for peace of mind. It's important for the person's pocketbook.

Now, I know that sounds too good to be true, but it's happening all across the country. As a matter of fact, 29 million people have signed up for this program. There are 42 million seniors eligible for Medicare, and 29 million people have signed up since January. And that's positive.

And by the way, when 29 million people show up for a new program, there's going to be some glitches. And you're about to hear from a man whose job it is to make sure that he takes care of the glitches. That's what Presidents do—they delegate. *[Laughter]*

We straighten out problems as they occur. Twenty-nine [million]* people have signed up. There are 6 million people who are eligible who have got a job, and they don't need the Medicare. I'm about to talk to a good man in that situation. And there's 7 million people who are eligible who have yet to sign up. And so the reason I've come today is to urge every senior here in the room and around the country who might be listening on TV that if you have not signed up for the Medicare Part D program, you really need to do it. That's the seminar part. That's trying to educate people.

And by the way, there's a lot of other people helping. It's not just me. We've got the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging helping. We've got the Organization of Chinese Americans helping. AARP is helping seniors realize what's available. The Federation of Korean Associations is helping to sign up people. Other Asian American groups all around the country are helping. Faith-based programs are helping people realize what's available. If you're a son or a daughter whose parent is eligible for Medicare, you need to do your duty. Be a good—be a good, loving child and explain to your parents that which is available for them.

And how do you do it? You can get on the computer, medicare.gov, and look and see whether or not your mom or dad ought to sign up for a program. I'm just telling you what's happening so far. People are saving a lot of money when it comes to their prescription drugs.

By the way, prior to this bill, we had people in this country who had to choose between food and pharmaceuticals, and that wasn't right. We had people who had to choose between paying their utility bill and whether or not they could pay for their prescription drugs. And that's not right.

This bill I signed and this program we're discussing helps change that. If you're eligible—and a third of the seniors are eligible—the Government will pay over 95 percent of your pharmaceuticals. We're a compassionate country. We want our program for Medicare to work well for our seniors.

I fully understand some of the seniors say, "I don't want any choices." And that's okay.

* White House correction.

But somebody ought to at least help you look. It doesn't cost a dime to look and see whether or not this program is meant for you. It doesn't cost one penny to see whether or not you can save money—and I bet you can. So part of the outreach here is to say to those of you who are helping our senior citizens realize what's available, thank you for what you're doing.

We've set a deadline for May 15th for people to sign up in order to get the discounts involved in the program. And so we're going to spend—"we" being the Government and people involved in the Government—are going to spend a lot of time traveling around the country explaining to our senior citizens, the 7 million who have yet to sign up, take a look. It's a good deal.

So I've got with me today some people who are involved in the program. First, Elaine Chao, she just spoke. She's the Secretary of Labor. She's been in my Cabinet since day one; she's doing a fine job. I'm proud to call her friend. Do you have some words of wisdom here?

Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao. Mr. President, I sure do. Number one, remember—please remember May 15th is the deadline date for the first enrollment. If you don't take advantage of the benefits by May 15th, your premiums will increase if you register by the second date, which is in November. Please remember, May 15th is very important.

Second of all, it's not that difficult to sign up. There are many organizations in your communities that can be of help. Also, call on your children, ask your children to help you sign up. Now, we know that there are many people who speak different languages, so the Department of Health and Human Services has actually toll-free numbers—now, I'm going to see whether I have them here—we have booklets and brochures in all different languages, including Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Japanese. And if you are a non-native speaker and you want some help, let me give you some toll-free numbers as well.

If you speak Chinese—that's Cantonese and Mandarin—the toll-free number is 1-800-582-4218. Don't bother taking it down;

there will be these numbers available at the desks, but I do want to tell you now just in case. The Korean number is 1-800-582-4259. And the Vietnamese toll-free number is 1-800-582-4336.

So as the President mentions, this is a good deal. For the majority of people, you're going to save money. So take a look at the Medicare Part D program, and please, do remember, May 15th is the signup date.

The President. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Okay, so here's the way this works. You're the President, you say to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, "Make sure the plan gets implemented." That's called delegation. He then turns to another guy, who happens to be a Texan named Dr. Mark McClellan. He's the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. It's a long word for, he's in charge of making sure people know what's available.

So when there's not enough operators to answer the phones—which took place earlier this year; as we said, call 1-800-MEDICARE—a lot of people called 1-800-MEDICARE, and they got a busy signal. So we said, wait a minute, make sure you've got enough operators. We had a problem with dual-eligible citizens, and he worked it out with the States. He's a troubleshooter.

He's also responsible for making sure that enough information gets out so that people can realize what's available. And I want to thank him; I want to congratulate him, even before he talks, for recognizing ours is a diverse nation. And this is an interesting meeting, isn't it, when you think about it. In other words, there are seniors from all walks of life, some of whom require a little special help to learn what's available—maybe a little assistance with the language. Maybe a special group, they've got confidence in a special group that might represent their heritage and their culture, and that group will help explain. We're reaching out to everybody. We want every senior eligible for Medicare to realize what's available.

Anyway, McClellan, you're doing a fine job. Why don't you explain to me what your responsibilities have been and what you intend to do to make sure people know what's available.

Dr. Mark B. McClellan. Well, thank you, Mr. President. As you said, this is the most important new benefit in the Medicare program in 40 years. And while prescription drug coverage is really important, this is part of making Medicare work in a new way to help people stay well and live longer, and not just pay the bills when they get sick. We can't afford that anymore.

To do that effectively, we need to collaborate. And you talked about delegation; well, what I've done is help, worked together with many partners around the country so that people can find out about what Medicare offers today. We're not just a program to think about when you get sick. Medicare can help you stay well and live much longer through prescription drugs, preventive benefits, and other help.

So we've started a new approach of reaching out at the grassroots level, we're partnering with more than 10,000 organizations around the country to reach all of our diverse beneficiaries where they live and work and play and pray.

That includes groups like the ones represented here, like the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging. Clayton Fong works very closely with me to help provide some of those translation services that you mentioned. It involves many local partners, like the Asian Service Center in Washington, DC, has worked closely with Qien, who is on my staff at CMS, and many of our other partners to help get the word out locally.

We want to make sure people know about this important new benefit, and if they have questions, there are lots of places to go to get the personal information they need to make a good decision and start saving. That includes the medicare.gov web site, which many of the sons and daughters of our beneficiaries are using, as well as the beneficiaries themselves. It includes our 1-800-MEDICARE, 24/7 customer service line, which has around 7,000 trained representatives now and can provide help in multiple languages for people who call in.

And it includes events like this one, that are taking place all over the country, more than 1,000 a week, where people like me, many of your other senior officials, are helping to get the word out and helping people

find out about how they can take advantage of this new assistance.

The President. Back me up here on the low-income part of the program.

Dr. McClellan. Well, the benefit for prescription drugs is important for everyone with Medicare. A typical senior can save about \$1,100 compared to not having drug coverage. That's more than half of their drug costs. And for people with limited incomes, that's about one in three of our seniors who are living month to month on a fixed income, they can qualify for extra help, they can get their prescriptions for no premium and usually just a few dollars for each drug—paying 95 percent of their drug costs. And that's a very important extra help to sign up for as well. And we can put you touch with the application process and get you into that program as well. It's very important extra help. It's worth about \$3,700 a year.

So for people—if you're on Medicare, if you've got a parent who is, someone you care about who is, looking into this program between now and May 15th means, literally, \$1,100 worth of help, at least; \$3,700 worth of coverage if you have a limited income; and protection for the future against those high drug costs that you mentioned earlier, Mr. President.

The President. Yes, this is a good deal. And it's really worth people looking at. I'm going to repeat: If you're a son or a daughter and your mother or dad is eligible for Medicare, you need to help your parent. You really do. You need to get on the phone or get on the computer, medicare.gov, or 1-800-MEDICARE.

Now, Qien He is with us. Qien, where were you born—yes, I know where you are. [Laughter] Where were you born?

Qien He. I was born in China.

The President. Isn't that interesting. Now he is a part of making sure that people realize the opportunities of Medicare. Born whereabouts in China?

Mr. He. Okay. First of all, on behalf of Asian—

The President. No, where were you born in China?

Mr. He. In China, in Beijing.

The President. Beijing. See, I'm asking the questions. [Laughter]

Mr. He. Okay.

The President. And you're a doctor?

Mr. He. Yes.

The President. Of what?

Mr. He. Doctor of social linguistics.

The President. Social linguistics. And when did you come to the States?

Mr. He. Nineteen-ninety.

The President. Nineteen-ninety. And here you are sitting on the stage with the President. You're welcome. We're glad you're here.

Mr. He. Thank you.

The President. And so what is your job?

Mr. He. Okay, I'm a health insurance specialist for the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services. My office is in Philadelphia.

The President. Your office is in Philadelphia?

Mr. He. Yes.

The President. So you've come all the way from Philadelphia to be here?

Mr. He. Yes, I come here last night. Tomorrow and tonight, I have to come back and organize a similar event tomorrow for seminar for people in Philadelphia. It's called, Market Closure Enrollment event, in Philadelphia. Actually, Secretary Chao will go with—

The President. Okay. So your job—one of the jobs is to continue to reach out to people in the Asian American community to convince them to pay attention to this program. So are you having any success?

Mr. He. Well, we have a lot of success. But here, I would like to share some successful stories with you.

The President. Okay, let me hear some. [At this point, Mr. He made brief remarks.]

The President. See, one of the interesting things about America is that there are thousands of people who work in the grassroots to make the communities in which they live a better place. It's really one of the great things about our country, isn't it, when neighbors help neighbors. And what he's really saying is, his job is to convince a neighbor to help a neighbor. That's called grassroots. That's what—it's kind of an odd word, maybe, for some to understand. It means at the local level, that people are willing to help somebody who needs help.

And that's what your job is, isn't it?

[Mr. He made further remarks.]

The President. Well, thank you. Listen, well, I appreciate it. [Applause] Hold on, hold on. Thank you. Save your energy. Thank you, very much, for that, Qien; thanks for your kind words.

What Qien is saying is, is that we recognize there are some people out there that sometimes aren't able to get the message like other people. And so we want this message to go throughout all the neighborhoods. Here, we're talking to Asian Americans, but we want people in every neighborhood to hear the message.

So, for example, we're working with the AARP to get the word out. The NAACP has been helpful to make sure that certain seniors who are eligible for this program get the message. That's what we want.

And so if you know somebody or if you're listening on TV and know somebody who's eligible for Medicare, make sure you call their attention to the program. And remember, there's a lot of seniors who might be a little confused at first over the number of choices. But convince them to be patient and look at what's available and help them design a plan that meets their needs. And what you will find is, there will be savings. People benefit from this program. It's worthwhile to look at.

I'm talking to Dr. Yining Wang. Welcome, Dr. Wang. Thank you for being here, sir. Got to speak into the mic. You're a doc?

Dr. Yining Wang. Yes, I'm doctor in the research area.

The President. Where were you born?

Dr. Wang. I'm born in Shanghai.

The President. Shanghai. And here he sits, as well, talking to the President of the United States. We're glad you're here.

Dr. Wang. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President. Proud you're here. When did you come to the United States?

Dr. Wang. Well, it's 1988.

The President. Nineteen eighty-eight.

Dr. Wang. Yes.

The President. That's a fine year.

Dr. Wang. No.

The President. Yes, it was. [Laughter] Well, maybe not for you, but for, you know—my dad got elected President in '88. Anyway—[laughter]—so you were a doctor. Where did you work?

Dr. Wang. I'm sorry?

The President. Where did you work?

Dr. Wang. I work in the cardiovascular area for the physiology and pathology.

The President. Oh, fantastic. And you're now retired?

Dr. Wang. I'm retired at the end of year 2004.

The President. That's good.

Dr. Wang. That's good. [Laughter]

The President. And so what happened? So you hear—how did you hear about the Medicare program?

[Dr. Wang made brief remarks.]

The President. Very good. Interesting story, isn't it? So here's a man, he's a well-educated fellow. The first reaction, however, to the program was, "There's so many choices; I don't think I want to get involved." That's a natural reaction, by the way. And yet, nevertheless, as he said it, "patience" was the word I think he used—but somebody helped you understand. AARP gave you some advice.

Dr. Wang. AARP, yes.

The President. You can get good advice from AARP; you can get good advice from somebody who works for the CMS; you can get good advice from somebody from your church; you can get good advice from your son or daughter. There are all kinds of ways to get good advice.

What we're doing here today is explaining to seniors, there's a lot of people willing to give you advice. And it's worthwhile taking a look. And the reason it's worthwhile taking a look is—you just heard the reason. The man said he's going to save about \$200 a month. That's good savings.

[Dr. Wang made further remarks.]

The President. That's great. You did a good job, doc. Thank you. Very good job.

Dr. Wang. Okay.

The President. I appreciate you. Thank you. Good job, sir.

Dr. Wang. Thank you so much.

The President. Bob Nakamoto, third generation American. Welcome.

Bob Nakamoto. Thank you.

The President. Look, this is a guy still working. Remember I said there's 6 million people still working who get good health care? He's one of the 6 million. Working strong at age 74, and he's not going to slow down a bit.

Mr. Nakamoto. That's right.

The President. Isn't that right? What do you do, Bob?

Mr. Nakamoto. I'm a chairman of a company called Base Technologies. We do IT consulting work, primarily with the Federal and State government; based in McLean, Virginia, and third generation Japanese American.

The President. Congratulations. And how is your company doing?

Mr. Nakamoto. We're doing well. We could do better with your help. *[Laughter]*

The President. Give a man a mic, there's no telling what he's going to say. *[Laughter]* Give us your experience. You took a look at what was going on, didn't you?

Mr. Nakamoto. Pardon?

The President. You took a look at the Medicare.

[Mr. Nakamoto made brief remarks.]

The President. See, here's the reason why we've asked Bob—one, is we like to be around successful people, don't we? Secondly, he is a fellow who is eligible, but has chosen to stay on the current program provided by his company, but recognizes that upon leaving the company, there's a good program available. And that's important for people to understand.

Twenty-nine million people have signed up. Here's one right here. There are 6 million people who have not signed up because they're working—and that's Bob. I bet there's somebody out there who represents that part of the 7 million people who are eligible, yet who haven't signed up. And it's really important for you to look.

So you've been looking around at these things, taking a look. You find it okay? I mean, you're a computer guy, so it's a little unfair to say whether—you know, whether or not—

Mr. Nakamoto. We're okay with that.

The President. Using friendly—it's user-friendly?

Mr. Nakamoto. Right.

The President. Yes. See, we try to design this program so it's called, "user-friendly." That means you can get on there if you're—you don't have to be a computer genius like Bob—and take a look.

Mr. Nakamoto. Right.

The President. Your advice is? Retire and get on it.

Mr. Nakamoto. Right.

The President. Well, not retire, but when retire.

Mr. Nakamoto. Yes. I don't know when that's going to be, but when that time comes, you'll know about it.

The President. There you go. *[Laughter]* Well, listen, I hope you get the feeling for why we're here. We're here to explain a really interesting opportunity for our seniors. If you don't want to sign up, by the way, you don't have to. The Government is not making you do anything you don't want, but what the Government is doing is giving you a lot of opportunities. In the case of Virginia citizens, over 40 opportunities to choose a program that suits your particular needs.

And by that I mean there's all different kinds of structures for the programs. You might be taking this kind of drug or that kind of drug. You might be taking a lot of drugs a month or no drugs a month. And therefore, you can design a program that says, this is best for me.

I strongly urge our fellow citizens to take a look. I want to thank those of you who are helping our seniors see what's available. And keep doing it up until May 15th. And even after May 15th. I repeat, if you're a son or a daughter and your parent is eligible for Medicare, do them a favor and do your duty by getting on medicare.gov or calling 1-800-MEDICARE and find out what's available. Just get people to send the forms to you and look. Ask your parents questions, or ask your parents' doctors questions, or ask your parents' pharmacist questions about what program they need. If you're a senior and you're going to your local pharmacy, many of the pharmacists are helping our seniors design a program that meets their needs.

Is it worth it? I really think it is. If you're a poor senior, the Government will pay most of your drugs. We really don't want to be a society where seniors have to choose between food and medicine. It's worth it even if you're not in that income category because you'll save money.

And saving money is good after you retire. It'll help you. If you're a son or a daughter—again, I repeat—do your duty. It will give you peace of mind to know that your mom or dad are taken care of.

We worked hard to get this bill passed. It's a good piece of legislation. It's one of those times where people are going to be able to say, "Well, the Government actually did a good thing for us."

And so I want to thank you all for coming. I particularly want to thank our panelists. I want to thank my fellow citizens who've come. I particularly want to, again, thank the vets—veterans who are here. Bob, thanks for your hospitality. Thank you for paying attention.

May God bless you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:07 p.m. in the Richard J. Ernst Community Center at Northern Virginia Community College.

Remarks at the Small Business Week Conference

April 13, 2006

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. So I see Eric behind the stage. I said, "Congratulations on being the Small Business Owner of the Year." And he said, "You know, if I thought part of the prize was having to stand in front of those cameras and introduce you, I might not have accepted it." [Laughter] But I appreciate your introduction, Eric. Thanks.

I want to thank you all for allowing me to come by to celebrate the Small Business Week with you. You know, I'm an MBA, but I got to tell you, the most instructive part of my understanding about how the economy works—when I was trying to meet a payroll. The entrepreneurs of this country not only create and run their own businesses, they work hard. But I've learned that it's a calling to run your own business. I mean, there's

something special about somebody who stands up and says, "I got a dream; I got a hope."

The great thing about the entrepreneur in the small-business sector of our economy is that you provide great steam and strength to the growth of our economy. And today I want to talk to you about why the small-business owner is at the cornerstone of our progrowth economic policies and what we intend to do to make sure that the environment for taking risk is strong and viable here in this country.

Before I do, I want to say thanks to Eric's wife as well, for being here. I appreciate my friend Hector Barreto. He's the Administrator of the SBA. Thank you for being here, Hector. Thanks for serving. I also had the honor of congratulating Andrew Field, who is the founder and president of printingforless.com, Livingston, Montana, for being the runner-up; as well as Barbara and Leroy Shatto, owners of Shatto Milk Company, Osborn, Missouri, for also being the runner-up to the SBA Small Business Persons of the Year.

This economy of ours is good. It's strong. It's a good time to be a small-business owner in America. After all, we grew at a healthy rate of 3.5 percent last year. That's the fastest rate of any major industrialized economy. We've now had 17 straight quarters of economic expansion. Real after-tax income has grown by more than 8 percent since 2001. After-tax means money in your pocket, that's what that means. That means, on average, Americans have an income that is \$2,100 higher this year than it was the beginning of 2001—that's after adjusting for inflation.

More Americans own a home today than ever before in history; more minorities own a home today than ever before in history. And that's positive news for this economy. Consumer confidence is at its highest point in nearly 4 years. Productivity is high, and it's on the rise. And that's good news for American entrepreneurs and really good news for American workers. Productivity increases improves the lives of our fellow citizens over time. Manufacturing activity is strong. This economy is going well, and the small-business owner is leading the way.

It's really important for our country to understand this fact: Small businesses are vital for our workers. Small businesses create two out of every three new jobs, and they account for nearly half of the country's overall employment. Think about that. Two out of every three new jobs are created by the entrepreneur. That's why it makes sense to have the small business at the cornerstone of a progrowth economic policy.

Recently, our economic reports showed that this economy added 211,000 jobs in the month of March. Over the last 2½ years, we've added 5.1 million new jobs. This is the 31st straight month that the American economy has added jobs. The national unemployment rate is down to 4.7 percent. That's lower than the average rate of the past four decades. When small businesses grow, the American economy benefits.

Small businesses are vital for our communities. You sponsor Little League teams, and you donate to local charities and community drives, and you serve on your school boards and hospital boards and different community groups. Without our small businesses and entrepreneurs, our communities would be less vibrant and less welcoming. I appreciate the fact that you're close to your customers. Your hard work and investment is the lifeblood of our cities all across the country.

Small businesses are vital to building a more hopeful future for this country. When you open up a shop or lease a factory or offer a new service, you take a risk. Risk-taking takes vision, and risk-taking takes courage. And it's the risk-takers—are people who help define the vibrancy of an economy.

I thought Ronald Reagan put it best when he said the entrepreneurs are the "explorers of the modern era." Welcome to exploration, and thank you for betting on a brighter future, and thank you for adding optimism into the soul of this country.

Opening a small business is a great opportunity for a lot of folks to realize their dreams. I believe that we should promote an ownership society in America. We want people owning something in this society. Women now own more than one-quarter of the businesses in our country. The number of women-owned businesses is growing strongly. Hispanic Americans are opening their

own businesses, and those businesses are opening at a rate—at three times faster than the national average. And those are positive developments for a society.

It's been said that having your own business means working 80 hours a week so you can avoid working 40 hours a week for somebody else. [*Laughter*] Owning your own business is a great responsibility. But there is a strong reward in being independent. And I hope there's a strong reward in your understanding that you're contributing mightily to this great Nation.

And so how do we continue to help people realize this sense of independence? My philosophy of government is this: Government's role is not to create wealth; the job of the government is to create an environment in which people are willing to take risk, in which entrepreneurship flourishes. And that's a strategy I've been pursuing and I'm going to continue to pursue. And so today I want to talk to you about three broad areas where we can continue to work to make sure this environment is good for the small-business owner. And that includes taxes and spending and health care and expansion of opportunities here and abroad.

First, creating an environment where small businesses can flourish begins with keeping taxes low and spending your money wisely. We've overcome a lot in this economy, and I want to thank you for your hard work in helping us overcome a lot. The history of the past 5 years has—the economic history of the past 5 years has shown this country's capacity to overcome some pretty major hurdles. We've overcome a stock market correction, a recession, a vicious attack on the United States of America. We've overcome war, and we've overcome natural disasters.

I told you what the statistics were about how fast this economy is growing. It's really amazing when you put it in the context of what you've helped us overcome. And I believe one of the reasons we've overcome these hurdles is because we put progrowth economic policies in place, starting with real, substantial tax cuts.

We cut the taxes for everybody who paid taxes. It wasn't one of these tax deals where, you know, "Okay, you're okay; you're not. Therefore, you get tax relief; you don't."

That's—I didn't think that was fair. You might remember, we lowered taxes on families by cutting the rates and by doubling the child credit. We reduced the marriage penalty. It didn't make much sense to tax marriage. [Laughter] We passed something else that I think makes a lot of sense for the small-business owner and the farmer and the rancher, is that we put the death tax on the way to extinction.

The problem with that is that it comes back to life in 2011. Congress needs to set aside politics and get rid of the death tax, for the sake of our small-business owners. It makes no sense for you to have to pay taxes while you're alive, and then they pay taxes on the same business after you die.

We cut the taxes on the small-business owners. If you want the small-business sector to grow, if you recognize two-thirds of new jobs are created by small businesses, it makes sense to let small businesses keep more of the money they make. After all, when a small-business owner has got more money in his or her treasury, you're likely to expand your business. You talk to some of these business—the folks who won the business award, I said, "How many jobs—how many employees did you have 5 years ago, and how many do you have today?"

You had how many 5 years ago?

Eric Hoover. Twenty-four.

The President. Twenty-four 5 years ago, and over 100 and—

Mr. Hoover. —107.

The President. —107. His business expanded. That's what we want. Two-thirds of new jobs are created by small-business owners, and when small-business owners have more money in their treasuries, they're likely to expand. I also recognize that many small-business owners are either a sole proprietorship or—a small business is a sole proprietorship, or a subchapter S corporation, or a limited partnership, which means that the principals pay tax—the business pays tax at the individual income tax level. So when we reduce taxes on individuals, we are really reducing taxes on small businesses as well.

There's a healthy debate in this town about cutting taxes; I understand that. And some in this town said cutting taxes would ruin the economy. Some of them said, "If you cut

taxes, this economy is going to look like the Great Depression." As a matter of fact, on the day when the Republicans in the House and the Senate were finalizing the 2003 tax cuts, one of the Democrat leaders said these tax cuts would do nothing to create jobs. That person was wrong 5.1 million times over in the last 2½ years.

And there's an ongoing debate about the taxes. Some in Washington proposed that we raise your taxes, either by repealing the tax cuts or letting them all expire. These are the same folks who said, "If you keep your own money, that would be irresponsible and reckless policy." Those folks were wrong then, and they're wrong now. To keep the small-business sector strong and creating jobs, Congress needs to make the tax relief permanent.

And they can start when they get back by sending me a bill that extends the tax cuts we delivered on dividends and capital gains, so that our businesses and investors can plan with confidence. Uncertainty in the Tax Code makes it hard for investors to plan. Uncertainty in the Tax Code makes it hard for small-business owners to plan. We need certainty in this Tax Code, and Congress needs to make those tax cuts permanent.

Oh, I know you'll hear the argument that says, "Well, we got to raise your taxes in order to balance the budget." That's not the way Washington, DC, works. I've been here long enough to tell you, it's not going to work that way. What will end up happening is, they're going to raise your taxes, and then they're going to figure out new ways to spend your money. The best way to balance this budget, the best way to cut the deficit in half by 2009, is to keep the progrowth economic policies in place and be wise about how we spend your money.

And that starts with setting priorities. I think you know something about setting priorities. When you run your business, you got to set priorities, and we got to set them here in Washington. So long as we've got people in harm's way, so long as we've got men and women in our uniform in a time of war, the number one priority of this Government is to make sure they got all what it takes to be victorious in the war on terror.

We're making progress on what's called discretionary spending. The last two budgets I've submitted has actually cut discretionary spending, except that which is applied for our military and homeland defense. And that required hard work by the Congress. But it's not enough, in order to get this deficit cut in half by 2009 and keep this economy growing. One way Congress can help is to pass the line-item veto. It's an important tool to help bring fiscal discipline here to Washington, DC.

And the idea has received bipartisan support. I was very pleased that my opponent in the 2004 campaign, Senator John Kerry, came down to the White House the other day and expressed his support for a line-item veto. He campaigned on a line-item veto, and now he's supporting the administration with a line-item veto. And other Democrats and Republicans must give the President the chance to trim out that part of the budget which does not meet our priorities. And I hope Congress passes this important piece of legislation quickly as a sign of reform.

In the long-term, though, the biggest challenge facing our—facing the budgets of the United States are those inherent in mandatory programs. And that would be Social Security and Medicare. We got a problem in these programs because there's a lot of people just like me getting ready to retire. *[Laughter]* As a matter of fact, my retirement age—my eligibility age for Social Security just happens to come in 2008. *[Laughter]* I hate to admit, I'm turning 60 this year. I can see some other folks out there fixing to turn 60 this year as well. *[Laughter]* And there's a lot of us. There's a lot of baby boomers who are living longer and are promised more benefits than the previous generation. And the system can't be sustained. It's just not going to work.

And there's an unfunded liability problem that faces this generation today, and it's going to be especially acute for a generation coming up. And Congress needs to take my offer to sit down at the table in good faith. We need people from both political parties putting their ideas on the table about how we can deal with Social Security and Medicare, how we can do our job. I tell people, the job of a President is to confront problems

and not to pass them on to future Presidents and future Congresses. And that's what the Congress ought to do—set aside needless politics and do what's right for the American people. And I'm going to work with them to do so.

To create an environment where small businesses flourish means that health care has got to be affordable and available, is a health care system that needs to make sure that we've got high-quality care at reasonable prices for our people. The Federal Government has made a strong commitment to the elderly, and we're going to keep that commitment. And by the way, if you've got a mother or father who's eligible for Medicare, you need to make sure he or she sees the new—the benefits of this new drug—prescription drug coverage we've got. This is a good deal for the American seniors. And we're working hard to make sure that American seniors realize that there is a fine opportunity for them to improve their lot in life.

Listen, I couldn't stand the thought of seniors having to choose between an electricity bill and pharmaceuticals. That didn't make any sense in our country. And if you're a low-income senior listening today, you ought to make sure you get ahold of a representative from Medicare or a friend or a churchmate, or call 1-800-MEDICARE, or get your son or daughter to get on medicare.gov and find out the benefits inherent in this program. If you're one-third of the seniors who are income-qualified, the Federal Government is going to pay 95 percent or more of your prescription drug benefits.

And the Federal Government can keep its commitment to the poor as well, by making sure Medicaid works well and by continuing to expand community health centers. It makes sense for the taxpayers to help us build community health centers for the poor and the indigent, to take the pressure off of our emergency rooms in America's hospitals—a place where people can get reasonable primary care.

But for the rest of us, we have got to make sure that the system is affordable and available without empowering the Federal Government to make all the decisions for the businessowners and the consumers and the

providers. There's a debate here in Washington, DC, about who knows what to do best about health care. And there's some folks who said, "The Federal Government can handle it all," and I'm not one of them. I believe the best health care system has the patient and the doctor central to the decisionmaking of this important industry. And I also understand that small businesses are hit hard by health care costs. As a matter of fact, many of the working uninsured work for small businesses, because small businesses cannot afford the health care they want to provide for their employees.

And so here are some ideas to help. One, I think it's important to, as I said, make sure the patient and the doctor are central to the health care systems. And therefore, I believe strongly in what's called health savings accounts. And I think it's very important for the small-business owners to pay attention to the benefits of a health savings account for your particular company.

Health savings accounts stand in contrast to the traditional insurance system. The traditional insurance system, as you know, the employer provides their employee with a plan that they pay for the deductible and a small copayment, and somebody else pays the bills. It's a third-party payer system. And when somebody else pays the bills, you really don't care about the cost, unless you're having to pay for the rising premium.

Here's the way health savings accounts work: It says that, on the one hand, you buy catastrophic insurance coverage at a low price, and on the other hand, there is a cash account that covers the deductible of the catastrophic plan, that's contributed into the plan by employer, employee, or combination of both, tax-free. And that's—you use that to pay for your ordinary medical expenses, until the catastrophic plan kicks in. If you don't spend the money, the interest on that money is tax-free, and you roll it over to the next year that you—in which you can contribute again.

It turns out that the combination of the contribution—the cash contribution into the tax-free health savings account, plus the premium on the insurance plan, is generally less than third-party payer systems. Small businesses can save money under this plan.

The plan also empowers the employee to make rational decisions about health care. The more the consumer is involved in the quality and price of a product, the more likely it is the product is not going to be increasing at double-digits rates. Consumer involvement is an important aspect of quality health care at affordable prices.

Over the past few years, the number of Americans who own health savings account has gone from 1 million to 3 million. More than a third of those who have chosen HSAs were previously uninsured. You know, if you're a young person feeling relatively healthy, you may decide, "I don't want any health insurance; I'm never going to get sick." You might remember those days. *[Laughter]* Doesn't it make sense to be able to set aside money on a tax-free basis—that you earn tax-free to cover future medical costs? Health savings accounts do just that. Forty percent of those who own an HSA have family incomes below \$50,000 a year. It's a really good idea, and I strongly urge you to look into them.

In Connecticut earlier this month, I met a small-business guy who runs a retirement community. He said a third of his employees now have HSAs—health savings accounts. It's given them good coverage, and it saved the company \$78,000 on health premiums. Health savings accounts make a lot of sense, and we've got to make them stronger, not weaker here in Washington, DC.

One obstacle to expanding health savings accounts is the Federal Tax Code. Under current law, employers and employees pay no income tax or payroll tax on any health insurance provided through the workplace. But if you buy insurance on your own, you don't get the same tax break. And that means that the self-employed or the unemployed or workers at companies that don't provide health insurance are at a great disadvantage. So Congress needs to end discrimination in the Tax Code and give Americans who buy HSA policies on their own the same tax breaks that those who get their health insurance from their employers.

Another problem with this Tax Code is that it limits the amount you can contribute to your HSA tax-free. The limit is usually tied to your deductible. Buy a high-deductible

catastrophic plan, and you can contribute up to the deductible, by current law. But sometimes your out-of-pocket expenses are greater than your deductible. It's especially important for those with chronic illnesses. They often have expenses that go well beyond their deductibles. And so we need to fix the Tax Code by raising the cap on the amount of money you can put into your HSA tax-free. Raising this cap is going to help Americans cover all their out-of-pocket expenses. And equally important, raising this cap will help make sure this product is attractive to people. We want people being able to have different options in the marketplace. We want people directly involved in the decisionmaking of their health care.

And by the way, I got another idea for small businesses, and that is business—small businesses ought to be allowed to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries so they can buy insurance at the same discount big companies get. So I'm a strong believer in health—association health plans.

Congress needs to act on this idea—it's a good idea for small businesses. I mean, if people want the small-business sector to flourish, then they ought to help small businesses be able to afford health care. This is a rational idea. It makes a lot of sense. The House has done its part, and now the United States Senate needs to do its part as well.

Here's another idea to make sure health care is affordable and available. We got too many junk lawsuits running docs out of business and running up the cost of your medicine. When it looks like you might get sued, if you're a doctor, then you practice what's called defensive medicine. In other words, you prescribe more than you should, more procedures than necessary, because you're constantly thinking about how to make sure you can make your case in front of a jury. These frivolous lawsuits, this plethora of lawsuits, is running up the cost of health care for you. It's not only causing your premiums to go up, but it's causing the cost of medicine to go up, as doctors try to protect themselves against a lawsuit.

And it affects the Federal budget, by the way. As you know, we've got a lot of health care here in Washington. We've got a Medicare system and a Medicaid system and a vet-

erans system. It is anticipated—it is estimated that we spend \$28 billion extra a year because of the defensive practice of medicine. And that's why I believe this issue is a Federal problem that requires a Federal response, and the United States Congress needs to pass medical liability reform this year.

A couple of other points I want to make on health care. In other words, we've got a comprehensive strategy that says, "We've got a better vision than having the Federal Government make all the decisions for you." It's a vision that says, "We're going to take care of the elderly, and we're going to help the poor." But it's also a vision that says, "We trust consumers, and we want the marketplace to function, and we want there to be reasonable policy to help deal with the rising cost of health care."

One such way is to promote transparency, so patients know exactly what their options are. When you really think about it, the health care field is not a very transparent place when it comes to price and quality. I mean, how many of you really ever shopped for health care? How many of you have ever actually gotten on the Internet and tried to compare price before you make a health care decision? Not many, because, one, the system has somebody else paying the bills for you, and, two, there's not a lot of transparency. So this Government is going to continue to work with folks in the health care field to make sure that price and quality are available to you as a consumer. It's amazing what happens when people have information at their fingertips before they make decisions.

And another way to help wring out the costs in health care is to help encourage and expand the health care industry to adopt information technology as an integral part of its industry. Many of you have done that. Many of you have used the—information technology to help enhance the productivity of your business. That's generally not the case in health care. I mean, think about the guy who goes to the hospital, and he's carrying the file with him where all the pages are handwritten. It's kind of a problem in health care, since most doctors can't write legibly to begin with. *[Laughter]*

And so I believe we ought to work to make sure we have electronic health records for each individual here in America that, one, protects your safety, but, two, carries your history with you so that we help wring out additional costs in medicine and, at the same time, reduce errors. So there's a comprehensive vision to make sure health care is available and affordable, particularly for our small-business owners.

I want to talk about something else, and that is how to make sure that small businesses can expand here at home and abroad. First at home: The Small Business Administration is working hard to make it easier for people to start up companies. We understand that sometimes people have got a good idea, but they're not sure how to get something started. They're a little worried about the startup. And so we've doubled the number of small-business loans out of the SBA since I came to office. And we've increased the number of loans to minority entrepreneurs by 175 percent. I told Hector I want people from all walks of life benefiting from Government programs, and he's done his job, and I appreciate that.

Another important fact is this: We've lowered the cost of running the SBA by more than 20 percent. And so we've increased the amount of our loans to the entrepreneurs by 80 percent. By reducing the cost of granting a loan, it makes the loan less expensive for you.

I'm also going to continue working up markets—working to open up markets overseas. I don't know if you realize this, but we're home to 5 percent of the world's population. That means 95 percent of the potential customers live outside of the United States. If you're good at making something or growing something, it seems like you'd want to make sure your customer base is expanded, that you have an opportunity to be able to access those markets.

Today, small-businesses account for about a quarter of this country's exports. I find that to be an encouraging and interesting statistic. The problem is that a lot of small businesses in certain markets find it very difficult to navigate the bureaucracies and paperwork required to sell their good or their service in a particular country. Big businesses have

got staffs of people who can do that; small businesses don't. And therefore, I think it is very important for the American citizen to understand that when we work to expand free and fair trade, in one way, we're helping to make sure the small-business sector of this country remains strong. The easier it is for somebody to sell a product in somebody else's market, the more likely it is people will be able to find opportunity here in the United States of America.

When I took office, we had three free trade agreements; now we've got free trade agreements with 11 countries and 18 more pending. I'm also pushing for an ambitious conclusion to the Doha round of the world trade talks so we can lower barriers and reduce regulations, to make it easier for people to be able to sell in foreign markets. So we need to be confident in our ability to compete. I believe the United States can outcompete anybody, anytime, anywhere, so long as the rules are fair.

And so one of the places—one country that can show the world that it means to be a trading partner that plays by the rules is China. This coming week, next week, I'm going to meet with President Hu Jintao, and I look forward to welcoming him to the White House. America values China as a trading partner, but we expect China to live up to its commitments. China needs to make itself more transparent. China needs to enforce intellectual property rights. China needs to take additional steps to address the trade imbalance between our countries. And China needs to move to a flexible market-based currency.

This country needs to be confident about the future, and we need to shape the future. And one way we can shape the future is to make sure that we stay on the leading edge of technology and research. And so I've called on Congress to double funding for basic—vital, basic research. I think that's a proper role for the Federal Government, to be involved with helping the basic sciences expand new horizons. Congress needs to make the research and development tax credit a permanent part of the Tax Code to encourage private sector to do its part about making sure this country is technologically advanced and innovative.

And our education system must make sure we set high standards and measure and make sure that we're just not passing kids through the schools that can't read and write. And I'm calling on Congress to encourage school districts to have a special emphasis on math and science. We want our children to be educated so they can lead the world. We want them educated with the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century.

I also recognize that in order for us to be competitive, we've got to get off oil. I said in my State of the Union that the United States has a problem—we're addicted to oil. Now, I know you probably thought that was kind of weird for a Texan to say. *[Laughter]* But I'm telling you, we've got an economic security problem because of our reliance upon fossil fuels, and we've got a national security problem because of our reliance on fossil fuels.

And I'm looking forward to working with Congress when they get back, to make sure we invest wisely in new technologies that will encourage additional use of ethanol to power our automobiles; new technologies that will enable us to develop plug-in batteries so that hybrid vehicles are able to drive the first 40 miles on electricity, without using any gasoline; new technologies that will encourage solar energy; and technologies that will enable us to develop a safe nuclear power industry. We're spending a lot of money right now on clean coal technologies. What I'm telling you is, we've got a comprehensive agenda and plan to take this country into a different era when it comes to consuming energy, an era that will make us less dependent on foreign sources of oil, enable us to be wise stewards of the environment.

I want to talk to you about another issue to make sure this country remains competitive, and that's immigration. This is a highly emotional issue; it's a vitally important issue. It's an issue that we need to conduct a debate on in a way that is worthy of this country's best traditions. We are a land of immigrants. Any immigration reform has got to improve the ability to secure our borders and enforce our laws. We are a nation of laws. I don't know if you realize this, but since 2001, we have turned back 6 million folks trying to come into this country illegally. There are

a lot of people working hard down on our borders, and we're going to continue to modernize the borders to enable them to do—better do their jobs. But any effective immigration reform must include a temporary-worker program that includes a legal way to match willing foreign workers with willing American employers to fill the jobs Americans will not do.

This immigration program should not provide automatic citizenship or amnesty. It should provide a chance for people to work here legally on a temporary basis. Encouraging people to abide by the law is a necessary part of our country—the history of our country. Recognizing that people are doing jobs here that nobody else will do is important for, perhaps, some of you here in this audience. Making sure there are tamper-proof identification cards so people can't cheat on the system makes sense to me. Treating people with dignity makes sense to me. Making sure the system doesn't force people into the shadows of our society, changing that system for the better—for security and for decency—makes sense to me. And the Congress needs to set aside partisan differences and get a good bill to my desk.

I was encouraged last week when Members of the United States Senate reached a promising bipartisan compromise on comprehensive immigration reform. That was a hopeful sign. Unfortunately, the compromise was blocked by the Senate Democratic Minority Leader. He refused to allow Senators to move forward and vote for amendments to the bill. It was a procedural gimmick that meant he was singlehandedly thwarting the will of the American people and impeding bipartisan efforts to secure this border and make this immigration system of ours more humane and rational. This town has got too much politics to it. It's time to set aside needless partisan politics and focus on what's right for the United States of America.

I appreciate being with people who are the entrepreneurs of this country. The entrepreneurial spirit of America is strong, and I intend to keep it strong. Look, I can't make you take risk; I can't make you dream. It's up to you. But I can keep your taxes low to make it easier for you to realize your dream. We can do something about health

care costs so that you can realize the dream of making sure your employees have got health care coverage. We can open up markets for you. We can make sure the environment is strong, so people continue to realize their dreams.

I love a society in which people are able to pursue their dreams, no matter who they are or where they're from. I think this really speaks to the greatness of the United States of America—a place where a person can start with nothing and end up with something, a place where a small-business owner can grow to be a big-business owner, if that's what he or she desires. A society in which people are able to accomplish their dreams is a whole society and a complete society.

Ours is a remarkable country because of the entrepreneurial spirit of America. And I want to thank you for being a part of this great land of ours. Thanks for what you do. Thanks for expanding the job base. May God bless you and may God continue to bless your families.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:46 a.m. at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center. In his remarks, he referred to Eric Hoover, president and chief executive officer, Excalibur Machine Co., and his wife, Annette; and President Hu Jintao of China. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Message on the Observance of Easter 2006

April 13, 2006

"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said."

Matthew 28:6

I send greetings to those observing the joyous holiday of Easter. On Easter, Christians around the world join together with family and friends to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the triumph of love over death. This is a season of renewal, a time for giving thanks and praise and for remembering that hope overcomes despair.

Christ's extraordinary sacrifice and compassion continue to inspire people around the world. His promise of new life gives hope and confidence to His followers. His service

and love for His neighbors offer a profound lesson for all people.

During this Easter season, we celebrate God's gifts of freedom and justice. We pray for peace and ask for God's blessings on the brave men and women who wear our Nation's uniform and their families.

Laura and I wish you a Happy Easter.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Proclamation 8001—Thomas Jefferson Day, 2006

April 13, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Today, we celebrate the birthday of Thomas Jefferson. Few individuals have shaped the course of human events as much as this proud son of Virginia. His achievements are extraordinary: Governor of Virginia, author of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, Secretary of State, third President of the United States, and founder of the University of Virginia. Thomas Jefferson was also a scholar, author, farmer, inventor, and architect. As President, Thomas Jefferson secured the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France, which doubled the size of the United States and extended opportunity and prosperity to many more Americans.

Thomas Jefferson was an eloquent and powerful champion of liberty. He captured the American creed when he wrote in a private letter: "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." And in one of the most important public documents in history, Jefferson wrote these words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The Declaration of Independence has become a cornerstone for those who love freedom and justice.

More than eight decades later, Abraham Lincoln returned to the words and meaning of the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln knew that in the distant future people would look upon it and “take courage to renew the battle which their fathers began—so that truth, and justice, and mercy . . . might not be extinguished from the land.” A century after Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., called the Declaration of Independence a “promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.”

The Declaration of Independence has become a standard by which other nations and peoples measure their progress in the effort to advance human freedom. Even nations that are not yet free pay homage to freedom, and it is seen as a universal human good.

Our Nation is vastly different than it was during the days of our founding—yet our commitment to America’s founding truths remains strong and steady. Our duty is to continue to fulfill the promise of Thomas Jefferson’s words and vision of a better life for all people. Meeting that responsibility is the best way we can honor the memory of the man who was an architect of the freest Nation on Earth.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim April 13, 2006, as Thomas Jefferson Day. I encourage all Americans to join in celebrating Thomas Jefferson’s achievements, reflecting on his words, and learning more about this extraordinary man’s influence on American history and ideals.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this thirteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., April 18, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on April 19.

Memorandum on Waiver and Certification of Statutory Provisions Regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Office

April 13, 2006

Presidential Determination No. 2006–12

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Waiver and Certification of Statutory Provisions Regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Office

Pursuant to the authority and conditions contained in section 534(d) of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2006, Public Law 109–102, I hereby determine and certify that it is important to the national security interests of the United States to waive the provisions of section 1003 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987, Public Law 100–204.

This waiver shall be effective for a period of 6 months from the date hereof. You are hereby authorized and directed to transmit this determination to the Congress and to publish it in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

Statement Supporting Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

April 14, 2006

Earlier today I spoke with Don Rumsfeld about ongoing military operations in the global war on terror. I reiterated my strong support for his leadership during this historic and challenging time for our Nation.

The Department of Defense has been tasked with many difficult missions. Upon assuming office, I asked Don to transform the largest department in our Government. That kind of change is hard, but our Nation must have a military that is fully prepared to confront the dangerous threats of the 21st century. Don and our military commanders have also been tasked to take the fight to the enemy abroad on multiple fronts.

I have seen firsthand how Don relies upon our military commanders in the field and at the Pentagon to make decisions about how best to complete these missions.

Secretary Rumsfeld's energetic and steady leadership is exactly what is needed at this critical period. He has my full support and deepest appreciation.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

April 8

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

April 10

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

The White House announced that the President will welcome Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon to the White House on April 18.

The White House announced that the President will welcome President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan to the White House on April 28.

April 11

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Columbia, MO, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Doris Hickman. He then traveled to Jefferson City, MO, where he visited Lutheran Senior Services at Heisinger Bluffs retirement community during a Medicare prescription drug plan enrollment session for senior citizens.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Des Moines, IA, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Anjana Chandran. He then visited Wesley Acres retirement community during a Medicare prescription drug plan enrollment session for senior citizens.

In the evening, the President returned to Washington, DC.

April 12

In the morning, the President met with Vice Premier Wu Yi of China to discuss the results of the recent Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade session. Later, he had an intelligence briefing. He then met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

In the afternoon, in the Yellow Oval Room, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a social lunch for President John Agyekum Kufuor of Ghana and his wife, Theresa.

Later in the afternoon, the President traveled to Annandale, VA. Later, he then returned to Washington, DC.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a retirement dinner for former U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and her husband, John.

The White House announced that the President will welcome Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany to the White House on May 3.

The President declared a major disaster in Arkansas and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and tornadoes on April 1–3.

April 13

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he had a telephone conversation with President Alejandro Toledo of Peru to congratulate him on the signing of a U.S.-Peru trade agreement.

In the afternoon, the President had lunch with Vice President Dick Cheney. Later, he and Mrs. Bush traveled to Camp David, MD.

The President declared a major disaster in Kansas and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, tornadoes, and straight-line winds on March 12–13.

The President declared a major disaster in Oklahoma and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and tornadoes on March 12.

The President announced his intention to nominate Anita K. Blair to be Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

The President announced his intention to nominate Anne E. Derse to be Ambassador to Azerbaijan.

The President announced his intention to nominate Robert S. Ford to be Ambassador to Algeria.

The President announced his intention to nominate Mark V. Rosenker to be Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board.

The President announced his intention to nominate Leslie V. Rowe to be Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.

The President announced his intention to nominate Daniel S. Sullivan to be Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs.

The President announced his intention to appoint Craig J. Duchossois and Robert Pacheco as members of the Board of Visitors to the U.S. Naval Academy.

April 14

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released April 10

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit of Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit of President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan

Released April 11

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 1259, S. 2116, and S. 2120

Fact sheet: Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage: Enroll Now and Start Saving

Released April 12

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary: President Bush To Welcome German Chancellor Merkel

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Arkansas

Released April 13

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.J. Res. 81 and H.J. Res. 82

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Kansas

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Oklahoma

Fact sheet: The President's Small Business Agenda: Helping Entrepreneurs Prosper

Released April 14

Announcement: President and Mrs. Bush Release 2005 Tax Return

Acts Approved by the President

Approved April 11

H.R. 1259 / Public Law 109-213

To award a congressional gold medal on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen, collectively, in

recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces

S. 2116 / Public Law 109–214
To transfer jurisdiction of certain real property to the Supreme Court

S. 2120 / Public Law 109–215
Milk Regulatory Equity Act of 2005

Approved April 13

H.J. Res. 81 / Public Law 109–216
Providing for the appointment of Phillip Frost as a citizen regent of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution

H.J. Res. 82 / Public Law 109–217
Providing for the reappointment of Alan G. Spoon as a citizen regent of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution